IN SECRET

by

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

Gerald Elbert
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AUTHOR OF "THE COMMON LAW,"
"THE RECKONING," "LORRAINE," ETC.

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TO

ELEANOR AND WHEATON VAUGHAN

DEDICATION

A grateful nation's thanks are due
To Arethusa and to you—
To her who dauntless at your side
Pneumonia and Flue defied
With phials of formaldehyde!

II

Chief of Police were you, by gosh!
Gol ding it! how you bumped the Boche!
Handed 'em one with club and gun
Until the Hun was on the run:
And that's the way the war was won.

III

Easthampton's pride! My homage take
For Fairest Philadelphia's sake.
Retire in company with Bill;
Rest by the Racquet's window sill
And, undisturbed, consume your pill.

ENVOI

When Cousin Feenix started west
And landed east, he did his best;
And so I've done my prettiest
To make this rhyme long overdue;
For Arethusa and for you.

R. W. C.

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IN SECRET

CHAPTER I

CUP AND LIP

THE case in question concerned a letter in a yellow envelope, which was dumped along with other incoming mail upon one of the many long tables where hundreds of women and scores of men sat opening and reading thousands of letters for the Bureau of P. C.—whatever that may mean.

In due course of routine a girl picked up and slit open the yellow envelope, studied the enclosed letter for a few moments, returned it to its envelope, wrote a few words on a slip of paper, attached the slip to the yellow envelope, and passed it along to the D. A. C.—whoever he or she may be.

The D. A. C., in course of time, opened this letter for the second time, inspected it, returned it to the envelope, added a memorandum, and sent it on up to the A. C.—whatever A. C. may signify.

Seated at his desk, the A. C. perused the memoranda, glanced over the letter and the attached memoranda, added his terse comment to the other slips, pinned them to the envelope, and routed it through certain channels which ultimately carried

the letter into a room where six silent and preoccupied people sat busy at six separate tables.

Fate had taken charge of that yellow envelope from the moment it was mailed in Mexico; Chance now laid it on a yellow oak table before a yellow-haired girl; Destiny squinted over her shoulder as she drew the letter from its triply violated envelope and spread it out on the table before her.

A rich, warm flush mounted to her cheeks as she examined the document. Her chance to distinguish herself had arrived at last. She divined it instantly. She did not doubt it. She was a remarkable girl.

The room remained very still. The five other cipher experts of the P. I. Service were huddled over their tables, pencil in hand, absorbed in their several ungodly complications and laborious calculations. But they possessed no Rosetta Stone to aid them in deciphering hieroglyphics; toad-like, they carried the precious stone in their heads, M. D.!

No indiscreet sound interrupted their mental gymnastics, save only the stealthy scrape of a pen, the subdued rustle of writing paper, the flutter of a code-book's leaves thumbed furtively.

The yellow-haired girl presently rose from her chair, carrying in her hand the yellow letter and its yellow envelope with yellow slips attached; and this harmonious combination of colour passed noiselessly into a smaller adjoining office, where a solemn young man sat biting an unlighted cigar and gazing with preternatural sagacity at nothing at all.

Possibly his pretty affianced was the object of his deep revery—he had her photograph in his desk—

perhaps official cogitation as D. C. of the E. C. D. —if you understand what I mean?—may have been responsible for his owlish abstraction.

Because he did not notice the advent of the yellow-haired girl until she said in her soft, attractive voice:

"May I interrupt you a moment, Mr. Vaux?"

Then he glanced up.

"Surely, surely," he said. "Hum—hum!—please be seated, Miss Erith! Hum! Surely!"

She laid the sheets of the letter and the yellow envelope upon the desk before him and seated herself on a chair at his elbow. She was *very* pretty. But engaged men never notice such details.

"I'm afraid we are in trouble," she remarked.

He read placidly the various memoranda written on the yellow slips of paper, scrutinised the cancelled stamps, postmarks, superscription. But when his gaze fell upon the body of the letter his complacent expression altered to one of disgust!

"What's this, Miss Erith?"

"Code-cipher, I'm afraid."

"The deuce!'

Miss Erith smiled. She was one of those girls who always look as though they had not been long out of a bathtub. She had hazel eyes, a winsome smile, and hair like warm gold. Her figure was youthfully straight and supple—— But that would not interest an engaged man.

The D. C. glanced at her inquiringly.

"Surely, surely," he muttered, "hum—hum!—" and tried to fix his mind on the letter.

In fact, she was one of those girls who uninten-

tionally and innocently render masculine minds uneasy through some delicate, indefinable attraction which defies analysis.

"Surely," murmured the D. C., "surely! Hum—hum!"

A subtle freshness like the breath of spring in a young orchard seemed to linger about her. She was exquisitely fashioned to trouble men, but she didn't wish to do such a——

Vaux, who was in love with another girl, took another uneasy look at her, sideways, then picked up his unlighted cigar and browsed upon it.

"Yes," he said nervously, "this is one of those accursed code-ciphers. They always route them through to me. Why don't they notify the five——"

"Are you going to turn *this* over to the Postal Inspection Service?"

"What do you think about it, Miss Erith? You see it's one of those hopeless arbitrary ciphers for which there is no earthly solution except by discovering and securing the code-book and working it out that way."

She said calmly, but with heightened colour:

"A copy of that book is, presumably, in possession of the man to whom this letter is addressed."

"Surely—surely. Hum—hum! What's his name, Miss Erith?"—glancing down at the yellow envelope. "Oh, yes—Herman Lauffer—hum!"

He opened a big book containing the names of enemy aliens and perused it, frowinng. The name of Herman Lauffer was not listed. He consulted other volumes containing supplementary lists of sus-

pects and undesirables—lists furnished daily by certain services unnecessary to mention.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Vaux; "—Herman Lauffer, picture-framer and gilder! That's his number on Madison Avenue!"—pointing to the typewritten paragraph. "You see he's probably already under surveillance—one of the several services is doubtless keeping tabs on him. I think I'd better call up the——"

"Please!—Mr. Vaux!" she pleaded.

He had already touched the telephone receiver to unhook it. Miss Erith looked at him appealingly; her eyes were very, very hazel.

"Couldn't we handle it?" she asked.

"*We?*"

"You and I!"

"But that's not our affair, Miss Erith——"

"Make it so! Oh, please do. Won't you?"

Vaux's arm fell to the desk top. He sat thinking for a few minutes. Then he picked up a pencil in an absent-minded manner and began to trace little circles, squares, and crosses on his pad, stringing them along line after line as though at hazard and apparently thinking of anything except what he was doing.

The paper on which he seemed to be so idly employed lay on his desk directly under Miss Erith's eyes; and after a while the girl began to laugh softly to herself.

"Thank you, Mr. Vaux," she said. "This is the opportunity I have longed for."

Vaux looked up at her as though he did not under-

stand. But the girl laid one finger on the lines of circles, squares, dashes and crosses, and, still laughing, read them off, translating what he had written:

"*You are a very clever girl. I've decided to turn this case over to you. After all, your business is to decipher cipher, and you can't do it without the book.*"

They both laughed.

"I don't see how you ever solved that," he said, delighted to tease her.

"How insulting!—when you know it is one of the oldest and most familiar of codes—the 1-2-3 and *a-b-c* combination!"

"Rather rude of you to read it over my shoulder, Miss Erith. It isn't done——"

"You meant to see if I could! You know you did!"

"Did I?"

"Of course! That old 'Seal of Solomon' cipher is perfectly transparent."

"Really? But how about *this!*"—touching the sheets of the Lauffer letter—"how are you going to read this sequence of Arabic numerals?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said the girl, candidly.

"But you request the job of trying to find the key?" he suggested ironically.

"There is no key. You know it."

"I mean the code-book."

"I would like to try to find it."

"How are you going to go about it?"

"I don't know yet."

Vaux smiled. "All right; go ahead, my dear Miss Erith. You're officially detailed for this delightful job. Do it your own way, but do it——"

"Thank you so much!"

"——In twenty-four hours," he added grimly. "Otherwise I'll turn it over to the P. I."

"Oh! That *is* brutal of you!"

"Sorry. But if you can't get the code-book in twenty-four hours I'll have to call in the Service that can."

The girl bit her lip and held out her hand for the letter.

"I can't let it go out of my office," he remarked. "You know that, Miss Erith."

"I merely wish to copy it," she said reproachfully. Her eyes were hazel.

"I ought not to let you take a copy out of this office," he muttered.

"But you will, won't you?"

"All right. Use that machine over there. Hum—hum!"

For twenty minutes the girl was busy typing before the copy was finally ready. Then, comparing it and finding her copy accurate, she returned the original to Mr. Vaux, and rose with that disturbing grace peculiar to her every movement.

"Where may I telephone you when you're not here?" she inquired diffidently, resting one slim, white hand on his desk.

"At the Racquet Club. Are you going out?"

"Yes."

"What! You abandon me without my permission?"

She nodded with one of those winsome smiles which incline young men to revery. Then she turned and walked toward the cloak-room.

The D. C. was deeply in love with somebody else, yet he found it hard to concentrate his mind for a while, and he chewed his unlighted cigar into a pulp. Alas! Men are that way. Not sometimes. Always.

Finally he shoved aside the pile of letters which he had been trying to read, unhooked the telephone receiver, called a number, got it, and inquired for a gentleman named Cassidy.

To the voice that answered he gave the name, business and address of Herman Lauffer, and added a request that undue liberties be taken with any outgoing letters mailed and presumably composed and written by Mr. Lauffer's own fair hand.

"Much obliged, Mr. Vaux," cooed Cassidy, in a voice so suave that Vaux noticed its unusual blandness and asked if that particular Service already had "anything on Lauffer."

"Not soon but yet!" replied Mr. Cassidy facetiously, "thanks *entirely* to your kind tip, Mr. Vaux."

And Vaux, suspicious of such urbane pleasantries, rang off and resumed his mutilated cigar.

"Now, what the devil does Cassidy know about Herman Lauffer," he mused, "and why the devil hasn't his Bureau informed us?" After long pondering he found no answer. Besides, he kept thinking at moments about Miss Erith, which confused him and diverted his mind from the business on hand.

So, in his perplexity, he switched on the electric

foot-warmer, spread his fur overcoat over his knees, uncorked a small bottle and swallowed a precautionary formaldehyde tablet, unlocked a drawer of his desk, fished out a photograph, and gazed intently upon it.

It was the photograph of his Philadelphia affianced. Her first name was Arethusa. To him there was a nameless fragrance about her name. And sweetly, subtly, gradually the lovely phantasm of Miss Evelyn Erith faded, vanished into the thin and frigid atmosphere of his office.

That was his antidote to Miss Erith—the intent inspection of his fiancée's very beautiful features as inadequately reproduced by an expensive and fashionable Philadelphia photographer.

It did the business for Miss Erith every time.

The evening was becoming one of the coldest ever recorded in New York. The thermometer had dropped to 8° below zero and was still falling. Fifth Avenue glittered, sheathed in frost; traffic police on post stamped and swung their arms to keep from freezing; dry snow underfoot squeaked when trodden on; crossings were greasy with glare ice.

It was, also, one of those meatless, wheatless, heatless nights when the privation which had hitherto amused New York suddenly became an ugly menace. There was no coal to be had and only green wood. The poor quietly died, as usual; the well-to-do ventured a hod and a stick or two in open grates, or sat huddled under rugs over oil or electric stoves; or migrated to comfortable hotels. And bachelors took to their clubs. That is where Clifford Vaux

went from his chilly bachelor lodgings. He fled in a taxi, buried cheek-deep in his fur collar, hating all cold, all coal companies, and all Kaisers.

In the Racquet Club he found many friends similarly self-dispossessed, similarly obsessed by discomfort and hatred. But there seemed to be some steam heat there, and several open fires; and when the wheatless, meatless meal was ended and the usual coteries drifted to their usual corners, Mr. Vaux found himself seated at a table with a glass of something or other at his elbow, which steamed slightly and had a long spoon in it; and he presently heard himself saying to three other gentlemen: "Four hearts."

His voice sounded agreeably in his own ears; the gentle glow of a lignum-vitæ wood fire smote his attenuated shins; he balanced his cards in one hand, a long cigar in the other, exhaled a satisfactory whiff of aromatic smoke, and smiled comfortably upon the table.

"Four hearts," he repeated affably. "Does anybody——"

The voice of Doom interrupted him:

"Mr. Vaux, sir——"

The young man turned in his easy-chair and beheld behind him a club servant, all over silver buttons.

"The telephone, Mr. Vaux," continued that sepulchral voice.

"All right," said the young man. "Bill, will you take my cards?"—he laid his hand, face down, rose and left the pleasant warmth of the card-room with a premonitory shiver.

"Well?" he inquired, without cordiality, picking up the receiver.

"Mr. Vaux?" came a distinct voice which he did not recognise.

"Yes," he snapped, "who is it?"

"Miss Erith."

"Oh—er—surely—surely! *Good*-evening, Miss Erith!"

"Good-evening, Mr. Vaux. Are you, by any happy chance, quite free this evening?"

"Well—I'm rather busy—unless it is important—hum—hum!—in line of duty, you know——"

"You may judge. I'm going to try to secure that code-book to-night."

"Oh! Have you called in the——"

"No!"

"Haven't you communicated with——"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Because there's too much confusion already—too much petty jealousy and working at cross-purposes. I have been thinking over the entire problem. You yourself know how many people have escaped through jealous or over-zealous officers making premature arrests. We have six different secret-service agencies, each independent of the other and each responsible to its own independent chief, all operating for the Government in New York City. You know what these agencies are—the United States Secret Service, the Department of Justice Bureau of Investigation, the Army Intelligence Service, Naval Intelligence Service, Neutrality Squads

of the Customs, and the Postal Inspection. Then there's the State Service and the police and several other services. And there is no proper co-ordination, no single head for all these agencies. The result is a ghastly confusion and shameful inefficiency.

"This affair which I am investigating is a delicate one, as you know. Any blundering might lose us the key to what may be a very dangerous conspiracy. So I prefer to operate entirely within the jurisdiction of our own Service——"

"What you propose to do is *outside* of our province!" he interrupted.

"I'm not so sure. Are you?"

"Well—hum—hum!—what is it you propose to do to-night?"

"I should like to consult my Chief of Division."

"Meaning me?"

"Of course."

"When?"

"Now!"

"Where are you just now, Miss Erith?"

"At home. Could you come to me?"

Vaux shivered again.

"Where d-do you live?" he asked, with chattering teeth.

She gave him the number of a private house on 83d Street just off Madison Avenue. And as he listened he began to shiver all over in the anticipated service of his country.

"Very well," he said, "I'll take a taxi. But this has Valley Forge stung to death, you know."

She said:

"I took the liberty of sending my car to the Racquet Club for you. It should be there now. There's a foot-warmer in it."

"Thank you so much," he replied with a burst of shivers. "I'll b-b-be right up."

As he left the telephone the doorman informed him that an automobile was waiting for him.

So, swearing under his frosty breath, he went to the cloak-room, got into his fur coat, walked back to the card-room and gazed wrathfully upon the festivities.

"What did my hand do, Bill?" he inquired glumly, when at last the scorer picked up his pad and the dealer politely shoved the pack toward his neighbour for cutting.

"You ruined me with your four silly hearts," replied the man who had taken his cards. "Did you think you were playing coon-can?"

"Sorry, Bill. Sit in for me, there's a good chap. I'm not likely to be back to-night—hang it!"

Perfunctory regrets were offered by the others, already engrossed in their new hands; Vaux glanced unhappily at the tall, steaming glass, which had been untouched when he left, but which was now merely half full. Then, with another lingering look at the cheerful fire, he sighed, buttoned his fur coat, placed his hat firmly upon his carefully parted hair, and walked out to perish bravely for his native land.

On the sidewalk a raccoon-furred chauffeur stepped up with all the abandon of a Kadiak bear:

"Mr. Vaux, sir?"

"Yes."

"Miss Erith's car."

"Thanks," grunted Vaux, climbing into the pretty coupé and cuddling his shanks under a big mink robe, where, presently, he discovered a foot-warmer, and embraced it vigorously between his patent-leather shoes.

It had now become the coldest night on record in New York City. Fortunately he didn't know that; he merely sat there and hated Fate.

Up the street and into Fifth Avenue glided the car and sped northward through the cold, silvery lustre of the arc-lights hanging like globes of moonlit ice from their frozen stalks of bronze.

The noble avenue was almost deserted; nobody cared to face such terrible cold. Few motors were abroad, few omnibuses, and scarcely a wayfarer. Every sound rang metallic in the black and bitter air; the windows of the coupé clouded from his breath; the panels creaked.

At the Plaza he peered fearfully out upon the deserted Circle, where the bronze lady of the fountain, who is supposed to represent Plenty, loomed high in the electric glow, with her magic basket piled high with icicles.

"Yes, plenty of ice," sneered Vaux. "I wish she'd bring us a hod or two of coal."

The wintry landscape of the Park discouraged him profoundly.

"A man's an ass to linger anywhere north of the equator," he grumbled. "Dickybirds have more sense." And again he thought of the wood fire in

the club and the partly empty but steaming glass, and the aroma it had wafted toward him; and the temperature it must have imparted to "Bill."

He was immersed in arctic gloom when at length the car stopped. A butler admitted him to a brownstone house, the steps of which had been thoughtfully strewn with furnace cinders.

"Miss Erith?"

"Yes, sir."

"Announce Mr. Vaux, partly frozen."

"The library, if you please, sir," murmured the butler, taking hat and coat.

So Vaux went up stairs with the liveliness of a crippled spider, and Miss Erith came from a glowing fireside to welcome him, giving him a firm and slender hand.

"You *are* cold," she said. "I'm so sorry to have disturbed you this evening."

He said:

"Hum—hum—very kind—m'sure—hum—hum!"

There were two deep armchairs before the blaze; Miss Erith took one, Vaux collapsed upon the other.

She was disturbingly pretty in her evening gown. There were cigarettes on a little table at his elbow, and he lighted one at her suggestion and puffed feebly.

"Which?" she inquired smilingly.

He understood: "Irish, please."

"Hot?"

"Thank you, yes,"

When the butler had brought it, the young man began to regret the Racquet Club less violently.

"It's horribly cold out," he said. "There's scarcely a soul on the streets."

She nodded brightly:

"It's a wonderful night for what we have to do. And I don't mind the cold very much."

"Are you proposing to go *out?*" he asked, alarmed.

"Why, yes. You don't mind, do you?"

"Am *I* to go, too?"

"Certainly. You gave me only twenty-four hours, and I can't do it alone in that time."

He said nothing, but his thoughts concentrated upon a single unprintable word.

"What have you done with the original Lauffer letter, Mr. Vaux?" she inquired rather nervously.

"The usual. No invisible ink had been used; nothing microscopic. There was nothing on the letter or envelope, either, except what we saw."

The girl nodded. On a large table behind her chair lay a portfolio. She turned, drew it toward her, and lifted it into her lap.

"What have you discovered?" he inquired politely, basking in the grateful warmth of the fire.

"Nothing. The cipher is, as I feared, purely arbitrary. It's exasperating, isn't it?"

He nodded, toasting his shins.

"You see," she continued, opening the portfolio, "here is my copy of this wretched cipher letter. I have transferred it to one sheet. It's nothing but a string of Arabic numbers interspersed with meaningless words. These numbers most probably represent, in the order in which they are written, first the

number of the page of some book, then the line on which the word is to be found—say, the tenth line from the top, or maybe from the bottom—and then the position of the word—second from the left or perhaps from the right."

"It's utterly impossible to solve that unless you have the book," he remarked; "therefore, why speculate, Miss Erith?"

"I'm going to try to find the book."

"How?"

"By breaking into the shop of Herman Lauffer."

"House-breaking? Robbery?"

"Yes."

Vaux smiled incredulously:

"Granted that you get into Lauffer's shop without being arrested, what then?"

"I shall have this cipher with me. There are not likely to be many books in the shop of a gilder and maker of picture frames. I shall, by referring to this letter, search what books I find there for a single coherent sentence. When I discover such a sentence I shall know that I have the right book."

The young man smoked reflectively and gazed into the burning coals.

"So you propose to break into his shop to-night and steal the book?"

"There seems to be nothing else to do, Mr. Vaux."

"Of course," he remarked sarcastically, "we could turn this matter over to the proper authorities——"

"I *won't! Please* don't!"

"Why not?"

"Because I have concluded that it *is* part of our

work. And I've begun already. I went to see Lauffer. I took a photograph to be framed."

"What does he look like?"

"A mink—an otter—one of those sharp-muzzled little animals!— Two tiny eyes, rather close together, a long nose that wrinkles when he talks, as though he were sniffing at you; a ragged, black moustache, like the furry muzzle-bristles of some wild thing—that is a sketch of Herman Lauffer."

"A pretty man," commented Vaux, much amused.

"He's little and fat of abdomen, but he looks powerful."

"Prettier and prettier!"

They both laughed. A pleasant steam arose from the tall glass at his elbow.

"Well," she said, "I have to change my gown——"

"Good Lord! Are we going now?" he remonstrated.

"Yes. I don't believe there will be a soul on the streets."

"But I don't wish to go at all," he explained. "I'm very happy here, discussing things."

"I know it. But you wouldn't let me go all alone, would you, Mr. Vaux?"

"I don't want you to go anywhere."

"But I'm *going!*"

"Here's where I perish," groaned Vaux, rising as the girl passed him with her pretty, humorous smile, moving lithely, swiftly as some graceful wild thing passing confidently through its own domain.

Vaux gazed meditatively upon the coals, glass in

one hand, cigarette in the other. Patriotism is a tough career.

"This is worse than inhuman," he thought. "If I go out on such an errand to-night I sure am doing my bitter bit. . . . Probably some policeman will shoot me—unless I freeze to death. This is a vastly unpleasant affair. . . . Vastly!"

He was still caressing the fire with his regard when Miss Erith came back.

She wore a fur coat buttoned to the throat, a fur toque, fur gloves. As he rose she naïvely displayed a jimmy and two flashlights.

"I see," he said, "very nice, very handy! But we don't need these to convict us."

She laughed and handed him the instruments; and he pocketed them and followed her downstairs.

Her car was waiting, engine running; she spoke to the Kadiak chauffeur, got in, and Vaux followed.

"You know," he said, pulling the mink robe over her and himself, "you're behaving very badly to your superior officer."

"I'm so excited, so interested! I hope I'm not lacking in deference to my honoured Chief of Division. Am I, Mr. Vaux?"

"You certainly hustle me around some! This is a crazy thing we're doing."

"Oh, I'm sorry!"

"You're an autocrat. You're a lady-Nero! Tell me, Miss Erith, were you ever afraid of anything on earth?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Lightning and caterpillars."

"Those are probably the only really dangerous things I never feared," he said. "You seem to be young and human and feminine. Are you?"

"Oh, very."

"Then why aren't you afraid of being shot for a burglar, and why do you go so gaily about grand larceny?"

The girl's light laughter was friendly and fearless.

"Do you live alone?" he inquired after a moment's silence.

"Yes. My parents are not living."

"You are rather an unusual girl, Miss Erith."

"Why?"

"Well, girls of your sort are seldom as much in earnest about their war work as you seem to be," he remarked with gentle irony.

"How about the nurses and drivers in France?"

"Oh, of course. I mean nice girls, like yourself, who do near-war work here in New York——"

"You *are* brutal!" she exclaimed. "I am mad to go to France! It is a sacrifice—a renunciation for me to remain in New York. I understand nursing and I know how to drive a car; but I have stayed here because my knowledge of ciphers seemed to fit me for this work."

"I was teasing you," he said gently.

"I know it. But there is *so* much truth in what you say about near-war work. I hate that sort of woman. . . . Why do you laugh?"

"Because you're just a child. But you are full of ability and possibility, Miss Erith."

"I wish my ability might land me in France!"

"Surely, surely," he murmured.

"Do you think it will, Mr. Vaux?"

"Maybe it will," he said, not believing it. He added: "I think, however, your undoubted ability is going to land us both in jail."

At which pessimistic prognosis they both began to laugh. She was very lovely when she laughed.

"I hope they'll give us the same cell," she said. "Don't you?"

"Surely," he replied gaily.

Once he remembered the photograph of Arethusa in his desk at headquarters, and thought that perhaps he might need it before the evening was over.

"Surely, surely," he muttered to himself, "hum — hum!"

Her coupé stopped in Fifty-sixth Street near Madison Avenue.

"The car will wait here," remarked the girl, as Vaux helped her to descend. "Lauffer's shop is just around the corner." She took his arm to steady herself on the icy sidewalk. He liked it.

In the bitter darkness there was not a soul to be seen on the street; no tramcars were approaching on Madison Avenue, although far up on the crest of Lenox Hill the receding lights of one were just vanishing.

"Do you see any policemen?" she asked in a low voice.

"Not one. They're all frozen to death, I suppose, as we will be in a few minutes."

They turned into Madison Avenue past the Hotel

Essex. There was not a soul to be seen. Even the silver-laced porter had retired from the freezing vestibule. A few moments later Miss Erith paused before a shop on the ground floor of an old-fashioned brownstone residence which had been altered for business.

Over the shop-window was a sign: "H. Lauffer, Frames and Gilding." The curtains of the shop-windows were lowered. No light burned inside.

Over Lauffer's shop was the empty show-window of another shop—on the second floor—the sort of place that milliners and tea-shop keepers delight in—but inside the blank show-window was pasted the sign "To Let."

Above this shop were three floors, evidently apartments. The windows were not lighted.

"Lauffer lives on the fourth floor," said Miss Erith. "Will you please give me the jimmy, Mr. Vaux?"

He fished it out of his overcoat pocket and looked uneasily up and down the deserted avenue while the girl stepped calmly into the open entryway. There were two doors, a glass one opening on the stairs leading to the upper floors, and the shop door on the left.

She stooped over for a rapid survey, then with incredible swiftness jimmied the shop door.

The noise of the illegal operations awoke the icy and silent avenue with a loud, splitting crash! The door swung gently inward.

"Quick!" she said. And he followed her guiltily inside.

The shop was quite warm. A stove in the rear room still emitted heat and a dull red light. On the stove was a pot of glue, or some other substance used by gilders and frame makers. Steam curled languidly from it; also a smell not quite as languid.

Vaux handed her an electric torch, then flashed his own. The next moment she found a push button and switched on the lights in the shop. Then they extinguished their torches.

Stacks of frames in raw wood, frames in "compo," samples gilded and in natural finish littered the untidy place. A few process "mezzotints" hung on the walls. There was a counter on which lay twine, shears and wrapping paper, and a copy of the most recent telephone directory. It was the only book in sight, and Miss Erith opened it and spread her copy of the cipher-letter beside it. Then she began to turn the pages according to the numbers written in her copy of the cipher letter.

Meanwhile, Vaux was prowling. There were no books in the rear room; of this he was presently assured. He came back into the front shop and began to rummage. A few trade catalogues rewarded him and he solemnly laid them on the counter.

"The telephone directory is *not* the key," said Miss Erith, pushing it aside. A few moments were sufficient to convince them that the key did not lie within any of the trade catalogues either.

"Have you searched very carefully?" she asked.

"There's not another book in the bally shop."

"Well, then, Lauffer must have it in his apartment upstairs."

"Which apartment is it?"

"The fourth floor. His name is under a bell on a brass plate in the entry. I noticed it when I came in." She turned off the electric light; they went to the door, reconnoitred cautiously, saw nobody on the avenue. However, a tramcar was passing, and they waited; then Vaux flashed his torch on the bell-plate.

Under the bell marked "Fourth Floor" was engraved Herman Lauffer's name.

"You know," remonstrated Vaux, "we have no warrant for this sort of thing, and it means serious trouble if we're caught."

"I know it. But what other way is there?" she inquired naïvely. "You allowed me only twenty-four hours, and I *won't* back out!"

"What procedure do you propose now?" he asked, grimly amused, and beginning to feel rather reckless himself, and enjoying the feeling. "What do you wish to do?" he repeated. "I'm game."

"I have an automatic pistol," she remarked seriously, tapping her fur-coat pocket, "—and a pair of handcuffs—the sort that open and lock when you strike a man on the wrist with them. You know the kind?"

"Surely. You mean to commit assault and robbery in the first degree upon the body of the aforesaid Herman?"

"I-is that it?" she faltered.

"It is."

She hesitated:

"That is rather dreadful, isn't it?"

"Somewhat. It involves almost anything short of life imprisonment. But *I* don't mind."

"We couldn't get a search-warrant, could we?"

"We have found nothing, so far, in that cipher letter to encourage us in applying for any such warrant," he said cruelly.

"Wouldn't the excuse that Lauffer is an enemy alien and not registered aid us in securing a warrant?" she insisted.

"He is not an alien. I investigated that after you left this afternoon. His parents were German but he was born in Chicago. However, he is a Hun, all right—I don't doubt that. . . . What do you propose to do now?"

She looked at him appealingly:

"Won't you allow me more than twenty-four hours?"

"I'm sorry."

"Why won't you?"

"Because I can't dawdle over this affair."

The girl smiled at him in her attractive, resolute way:

"Unless we find that book we can't decipher this letter. The letter comes from Mexico,—from that German-infested Republic. It is written to a man of German parentage and it is written in cipher. The names of Luxburg, Caillaux, Bolo, Bernstorff are still fresh in our minds. Every day brings us word of some new attempt at sabotage in the United States. Isn't there *any* way, Mr. Vaux, for us to secure the key to this cipher letter?"

"Not unless we go up and knock this man Lauffer on the head. Do you want to try it?"

"Couldn't we knock rather gently on his head?"

Vaux stifled a laugh. The girl was so pretty, the risk so tremendous, the entire proceeding so utterly outrageous that a delightful sense of exhilaration possessed him.

"Where's that gun?" he said.

She drew it out and handed it to him.

"Is it loaded?"

"Yes."

"Where are the handcuffs?"

She fished out the nickel-plated bracelets and he pocketed his torch. A pleasant thrill passed through the rather ethereal anatomy of Mr. Vaux.

"All right," he said briskly. "Here's hoping for adjoining cells!"

To jimmy the glass door was the swiftly cautious work of a moment or two. Then the dark stairs rose in front of them and Vaux took the lead. It was as cold as the pole in there, but Vaux's blood was racing now. And alas! the photograph of Arethusa was in his desk at the office!

On the third floor he flashed his torch through an empty corridor and played it smartly over every closed door. On the fourth floor he took his torch in his left hand, his pistol in his right.

"The door to the apartment is open!" she whispered.

It was. A lamp on a table inside was still burning. They had a glimpse of a cheap carpet on the floor, cheap and gaudy furniture. Vaux extinguished and pocketed his torch, then, pistol lifted, he stepped noiselessly into the front room.

It seemed to be a sort of sitting-room, and was in disorder; cushions from a lounge lay about the floor; several books were scattered near them; an upholstered chair had been ripped open and disembowelled, and its excelsior stuffing strewn broadcast.

"This place looks as though it had been robbed!" whispered Vaux. "What the deuce do you suppose has happened?"

They moved cautiously to the connecting-door of the room in the rear. The lamplight partly illuminated it, revealing it as a bedroom.

Bedclothes trailed to the floor, which also was littered with dingy masculine apparel flung about at random. Pockets of trousers and of coats had been turned inside out, in what apparently had been a hasty and frantic search.

The remainder of the room was in disorder, too; underwear had been pulled from dresser and bureau; the built-in wardrobe doors swung ajar and the clothing lay scattered about, every pocket turned inside out.

"For heaven's sake," muttered Vaux, "what do you suppose this means?"

"Look!" she whispered, clutching his arm and pointing to the fireplace at their feet.

On the white-tiled hearth in front of the unlighted gas-logs lay the stump of a cigar.

From it curled a thin thread of smoke.

They stared at the smoking stub on the hearth, gazed fearfully around the dimly lighted bedroom, and peered into the dark dining-room beyond.

Suddenly Miss Erith's hand tightened on his sleeve.

"Hark!" she motioned.

He heard it, too—a scuffling noise of heavy feet behind a closed door somewhere beyond the darkened dining-room.

"There's somebody in the kitchenette!" she whispered.

Vaux produced his pistol; they stole forward into the dining-room; halted by the table.

"Flash that door," he said in a low voice.

Her electric torch played over the closed kitchen door for an instant, then, at a whispered word from him, she shut it off and the dining-room was plunged again into darkness.

And then, before Vaux or Miss Erith had concluded what next was to be done, the kitchen door opened; and, against the dangling lighted bulb within, loomed a burly figure wearing hat and overcoat; and a big bass voice rumbled through the apartment:

"All right, all right, keep your shirt on and I'll get your coat and vest for you——"

Then Miss Erith flashed her torch full in the man's face, blinding him. And Vaux covered him with levelled pistol.

Even then the man made a swift motion toward his pocket, but at Vaux's briskly cheerful warning he checked himself and sullenly and very slowly raised both empty hands.

"All right, all right," he grumbled. "It's on me this time. Go on; what's the idea?"

"W-well, upon my word!" stammered Vaux, "it's Cassidy!"

"F'r the love o' God," growled Cassidy, "is that

you, Mr. Vaux!" He lowered his arms sheepishly, reached out and switched on the ceiling light over the dining-room table. "Well, f'r——"he began; and, seeing Miss Erith, subsided.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Vaux, disgusted with this glaring example of interference from another service.

"What am I doing?" repeated Cassidy with a sarcastic glance at Miss Erith. "Faith, I'm pinching a German gentleman we've been watching these three months and more. Is that what you're up to, too?"

"Herman Lauffer?"

"That's the lad, sir. He's in the kitchen yonder, dressing f'r to take a little walk. I gotta get his coat and vest. And what are you doing here, sir?"

"How did *you* get in?" asked Miss Erith, flushed with chagrin and disappointment.

"With keys, ma'am."

"Oh, Lord!" said Vaux, "we jimmied the door. What do you think of that, Cassidy?"

"Did you so?" grinned Cassidy, now secure in his triumphant priority and inclined to become friendly.

"I never dreamed that your division was watching Lauffer," continued Vaux, still red with vexation. "It's a wonder we didn't spoil the whole affair between us."

"It is that!" agreed Cassidy with a wider grin. "And you can take it from me, Mr. Vaux, we never knew that the Postal Inspection was on to this fellow at all at all until you called me to stop outgoing letters."

"What have you on him?" inquired Vaux.

Cassidy laughed:

"Oh, listen then! Would you believe this fellow was tryin' the old diagonal trick? Sure it was easy; I saw him mail a letter this afternoon and I got it. I'd been waiting three months for him to do something like that. But he's a fox—he is that, Mr. Vaux! Do you want to see the letter? I have it on me——"

He fished it out of his inside pocket and spread it on the dining table under the light.

"You know the game," he remarked, laying a thick forefinger on the diagonal line bisecting the page. "All I had to do was to test the letter by drawing that line across it from corner to corner. Read the words that the line cuts through. Can you beat it?"

Vaux and Miss Erith bent over the letter, read the apparently innocent message it contained, then read the words through which the diagonal line had been drawn.

Then Cassidy triumphantly read aloud the secret and treacherous information which the letter contained:

"Seven United States transports to-day left New York (by the) Northern Route. Inform our U-boats. Urgency requires instant measures. Ten more are to sail from here next week."

"The dirty Boche!" added Cassidy. "Dugan has left for Mexico to look up this brother of his and I'm lookin' up this snake, so I guess there's no harm done so far."

"New York.

"January 3rd, 1918.

"My dear Brother:

"For seven long weeks I have awaited a letter from you. The United-States mails from Mexico seem to be interrupted. Imagine my transports of joy when at last I hear from you today. You and I, dear brother, are the only ones left of our family--you in Vera Cruz. I in New-York--you in a hot Southern climate, I in a Northern, amid snow and ice, where the tardy sun does not route me from my bed till late in the morning.

"However, I inform you with pleasure that I am well. I rejoice that our good health is mutual. After all, the dear old U. S. suits me. Of course railroads or boats could carry me to a warm climate, in case urgency required it. But I am quite well now, and my health requires merely prudence. However, if I am again ill at any instant, I shall leave for Florida, where all the proper measures can be taken to combat my rheumatism.

"Ten days ago I was in bed, and unable to do more than move my left arm. But the doctors are confident that my malady is not going to return. If it does threaten to return I shall sail for Jacksonville at once, and from there go to Miami, and not return here until the warm and balmy weather of next spring has lasted at least a week.

Affectionately your brother,

"Herman."

He pocketed the letter and went into the bedroom to get a coat and vest for the prisoner. Miss Erith looked at Vaux.

"Cassidy seems to know nothing about the code-cipher," she whispered. "I think he rummaged on general principles, not in search of any code-book."

She looked around the dining-room. The doors of the yellow oak sideboard were open, but no book was there among the plated knives and forks and the cheap dishes.

Cassidy came back with the garments he had been looking for—an overcoat, coat and vest—and he carried them into the kitchenette, whither presently Vaux followed him.

Cassidy had just unlocked the handcuffs from the powerful wrists of a dark, stocky, sullen man who stood in his shirt-sleeves near a small deal table.

"Lauffer?" inquired Vaux, dryly.

"It sure is, ain't it, Herman?" replied Cassidy facetiously. "Now, then, me Dutch bucko, climb into your jeans, if *you* please—there's a good little Boche!"

Vaux gazed curiously at the spy, who returned his inspection coolly enough while he wrinkled his nose at him, and his beady eyes roamed over him.

When the prisoner had buttoned his vest and coat, Cassidy snapped on the bracelets again, whistling cheerily under his breath.

As they started to leave the kitchenette, Vaux, who brought up the rear, caught sight of a large, thick book lying on the pantry shelf. It was labelled "Perfect Cook-Book," but he picked it up, shoved it

into his overcoat pocket *en passant,* and followed Cassidy and his prisoner into the dining-room.

Here Cassidy turned humorously to him and to Miss Erith.

"I've cleaned up the place," he remarked, "but you're welcome to stay here and rummage if you want to. I'm sending one of our men back to take possession as soon as I lock up this bird."

"All right. Good luck," nodded Vaux.

Cassidy tipped his derby to Miss Erith, bestowed a friendly grin on Vaux.

"Come along, old sport!" he said genially to Lauffer; and he walked away with his handcuffed prisoner, whistling "Garryowen."

"Wait!" motioned Vaux to Miss Erith. He went to the stairs, listened to the progress of agent and prey, heard the street-door clash, then hastened back to the lighted dining-room, pulling the "Perfect Cook-Book" from his pocket.

"I found that in the kitchenette," he remarked, laying it before her on the table. "Maybe that's the key?"

"A cook-book!" She smiled, opened it. "Why —why, it's a *dictionary!*" she exclaimed excitedly.

"A dictionary!"

"Yes! Look! Stormonth's English Dictionary!"

"By ginger!" he said. "I believe it's the code-book! Where is your cipher letter, Miss Erith!"

The girl produced it with hands that trembled a trifle, spread it out under the light. Then she drew from her pocket a little pad and a pencil.

"Quick," she said, "look for page 17!"

"Yes, I have it!"

"First column!"

"Yes."

"Now try the twentieth word from the top!"

He counted downward very carefully.

"It is the word 'anagraph,'" he said; and she wrote it down.

"Also, we had better try the twentieth word counting from the bottom of the page up," she said. "It might possibly be that."

"The twentieth word, counting from the bottom of the column upward, is the word 'an,'" he said. She wrote it.

"Now," she continued, "try page 15, second column, third word from *top!*"

"'Ambrosia' is the word."

"Try the third word from the *bottom.*"

"'American.'"

She pointed to the four words which she had written. Counting from the *top* of the page downward the first two words were "Anagraph ambrosia." But counting from the *bottom* upward the two words formed the phrase: *"An American."*

"Try page 730, first column, seventh word from the bottom," she said, controlling her excitement with an effort.

"The word is 'who.'"

"Page 212, second column, first word!"

"'For.'"

"Page 507, first column, seventh word!"

"'Reasons.'"

"We have the key!" she exclaimed. "Look at

what I've written!—'An American who for reasons!' And here, in the cipher letter, it goes on—'of the most'—Do you see?"

"It certainly looks like the key," he said. "But we'd better try another word or two."

"Try page 717, first column, ninth word."

"The word is 'vital.'"

"Page 274, second column, second word."

"'Importance!'"

"It *is* the key! Here is what I have written: 'An American who for reasons of the most vital importance!' Quick. We don't want a Secret Service man to find us here, Mr. Vaux! He'd object to our removing this book from Lauffer's apartment. Put it into your pocket and run!" And the pretty Miss Erith turned and took to her heels with Vaux after her.

Through the disordered apartment and down the stairs they sped, out into the icy darkness and around the corner, where her car stood, engine running, and a blanket over the hood.

As soon as the chauffeur espied them he whisked off the blanket; Miss Erith said: "Home!" and jumped in, and Vaux followed.

Deep under the fur robe they burrowed, shivering more from sheer excitement than from cold, and the car flew across to Fifth Avenue and then northward along deserted sidewalks and a wintry park, where naked trees and shrubs stood stark as iron in the lustre of the white electric lamps.

"That time the Secret Service made a mess of it,"

he said with a nervous laugh. "Did you notice Cassidy's grin of triumph?"

"Poor Cassidy," she said.

"I don't know. He butted in."

"All the services are working at cross-purposes. It's a pity."

"Well, Cassidy got his man. That's practically all he came for. Evidently he never heard of a code-book in connection with Lauffer's activities. That diagonal cipher caught him."

"What luck," she murmured, "that you noticed that cook-book in the pantry! And what common sense you displayed in smuggling it!"

"I didn't suppose it was *the* book; I just took a chance."

"To take a chance is the best way to make good, isn't it?" she said, laughing. "Oh, I am so thrilled, Mr. Vaux! I shall sit up all night over my darling cipher and my fascinating code-book-dictionary."

"Will you be down in the morning?" he inquired.

"Of course. Then to-morrow evening, if you will come to my house, I shall expect to show you the entire letter neatly deciphered."

"Fine!" he exclaimed as the car stopped before her door.

She insisted on sending him home in her car, and he was very grateful; so when he had seen her safely inside her house with the cook-book-dictionary clasped in her arms and a most enchanting smile on her pretty face, he made his adieux, descended the steps, and her car whirled him swiftly homeward through the arctic night.

CHAPTER II

THE SLIP

WHEN Clifford Vaux arrived at a certain huge building now mostly devoted to Government work connected with the war, he found upon his desk a dictionary camouflaged to represent a cook-book; and also Miss Erith's complete report. And he lost no time in opening and reading the latter document:

"CLIFFORD VAUX, ESQ.,

"D. C. of the E. C. D.,

"P. I. Service. (Confidential)

"Sir:

"I have the honour to report that the matter with which you have entrusted me is now entirely cleared up.

"This short preliminary memorandum is merely to refresh your memory concerning the particular case herewith submitted in detail.

"In re Herman Lauffer:

"The code-book, as you recollect, is Stormonth's English Dictionary, XIII Edition, published by Wm. Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh and London, MDCCCXCVI. This book I herewith return to you.

"The entire cipher is, as we guessed, arbitrary and stupidly capricious. Phonetic spelling is indulged in occasionally—I should almost say humorously—were it not a Teuton mind which evolved the phonetic combinations which represent proper names not

found in that dictionary—names like Holzminden and New York, for example.

"As for the symbols and numbers, they are not at all obscure. Reference to the dictionary makes the cipher perfectly clear.

"In Stormonth's Dictionary you will notice that each page has two columns; each column a varying number of paragraphs; some of the paragraphs contain more than one word to be defined.

"In the cipher letter the first number of any of the groups of figures which are connected by dashes (—) and separated by vertical (|) represents the page in Stormonth's Dictionary on which the word is to be found.

"The second number represents the column (1 or 2) in which the word is to be found.

"The third number indicates the position of the word, counting from the bottom of the page upward, in the proper column.

"Roman numerals which sometimes follow, enclosed in a circle, give the position of the word in the paragraph, if it does not, as usual, begin the paragraph.

"The phonetic spelling of Holzminden is marked by an asterisk when first employed. Afterward only the asterisk (*) is used, instead of the cumbersome phonetic symbol.

"Minus and plus signs are naïvely used to subtract or to add letters or to connect syllables. Reference to the code-book makes all this clear enough.

"In the description of the escaped prisoner, Roman numerals give his age; Roman and Arabic his height in feet and inches.

"Arabic numerals enclosed in circles represent capital letters as they occur in the middle of a page in the dictionary—as S, for example, is printed in the middle of the page; and all words beginning with S follow in proper sequence.

"With the code-book at your elbow the cipher will prove to be perfectly simple. Without the code it is impossible for any human being to solve such a cipher, as you very well know.

"I herewith append the cipher letter, the method of translation, and the complete message.

"Respectfully,
"EVELYN ERITH: E. C. D."

Complete Translation of Cipher Letter with Parenthetical Suggestions by Miss Erith.

To
B 60-02,

An American, who for reasons of the most vital importance has been held as an English *(civilian?) civic prisoner in the mixed civilian (concentration) camp at Holzminden, has escaped. It is now feared that he has made his way safely to New York.* (Memo: Please note the very ingenious use of phonetics to spell out New York. E. E.)

(His) name (is) Kay McKay and he has been known as Kay McKay of Isla—a Scotch title—he having inherited from his grandfather (a) property in Scotland called Isla, which is but a poor domain (consisting of the river) Isla and the adjoining moors and a large white-washed manor (house) in very poor repair.

After his escape from Holzminden it was at first believed that McKay had been drowned in (the River) Weser. Later it was ascertained that he sailed for an American port via *a Scandinavian liner sometime (in) October.*

(This is his) description: Age 32; height 5 feet 8½ inches; eyes brown; hair brown; nose straight; mouth regular; face oval; teeth white and even—no dental work; small light-brown moustache; no superficial identification marks.

The bones in his left foot were broken many years ago, but have been properly set. Except for an hour or so every two or three months, he suffers no lameness.

He speaks German without accent; French with an English accent.

Until incarcerated (in Holzminden camp) he had never been intemperate. There, however, through orders from Berlin, he was tempted and encouraged in the use of intoxicants—other drink, indeed, being excluded from his allowance—so that after the second year he had become more or less addicted (to the use of alcohol).

Unhappily, however, this policy, which had been so diligently and so thoroughly pursued in order to make him talkative and to surprise secrets from him when intoxicated (failed to produce the so properly expected results and) only succeeded in making of the young man a hopeless drunkard.

Sterner measures had been decided on, and, in fact, had already been applied, when the prisoner escaped by tunnelling.

Now, it is most necessary to discover this McKay (man's whereabouts and to have him destroyed by our agents in New York). Only his death can restore to the (Imperial German) Government its perfect sense of security and its certainty of (ultimate) victory.

The necessity (for his destruction) lies in the unfortunate and terrifying fact that he is cognisant of the Great Secret! *He should have been executed at Holzminden within an hour (of his incarceration).*

This was the urgent advice of Von Tirpitz. But unfortunately High Command intervened with the expectation (of securing from the prisoner) further information (concerning others who, like himself,

might possibly have become possessed in some measure of a clue to the Great Secret)? E. E.

The result is bad. (That the prisoner has escaped without betraying a single word of information useful to us.) E. E.

Therefore, find him and have him silenced without delay. The security of the Fatherland depends on this (man's immediate death).

M 17.

(Evidently the writer of the letter) *E. E.*

For a long time Vaux sat studying cipher and translation. And at last he murmured:

"Surely, surely. Fine—very fine. . . . Excellent work. But—*what* is the Great Secret?"

There was only one man in America who knew.

And he had landed that morning from the Scandinavian steamer, *Peer Gynt,* and, at that very moment, was standing by the bar of the Hotel Astor, just sober enough to keep from telling everything he knew to the bartenders, and just drunk enough to talk too much in a place where the enemy always listens.

He said to the indifferent bartender who had just served him:

" 'F you knew what I know 'bout Germany, you'd be won'ful man! *I'm* won'ful man. I know something! Going tell, too. Going see 'thorities this afternoon. Going tell 'em great secret! . . . Grea' milt'ry secret! Tell 'em all 'bout it! Grea' secresh! Nobody knows grea'-sekresh 'cep m'self! Whaddya thinka that? Gimme l'il Hollanschnapps n'water onna side!"

Hours later he was, apparently, no drunker—as

though he could not manage to get beyond a certain stage of intoxication, no matter how recklessly he drank.

"'Nother H llanschnapps," he said hazily. "Goin' see 'thor ties 'bout grea' sekresh! Tell 'em all 'bout it. Anybody try stop me, knockem down. Thassa way. . . . N-n-nockem out!—stan' no nonsense! Ge' me?"

Later he sauntered off on slightly unsteady legs to promenade himself in the lobby and Peacock Alley.

Three men left the barroom when he left. They continued to keep him in view.

Although he became no drunker, he grew politer after every drink—also whiter in the face—and the bluish, bruised look deepened under his eyes.

But he was a Chesterfield in manners; he did not stare at any of the lively young persons in Peacock Alley, who seemed inclined to look pleasantly at him; he made room for them to pass, hat in hand.

Several times he went to the telephone desk and courteously requested various numbers; and always one of the three men who had been keeping him in view stepped into the adjoining booth, but did not use the instrument.

Several times he strolled through the crowded lobby to the desk and inquired whether there were any messages or visitors for Mr. Kay McKay; and the quiet, penetrating glances of the clerks on duty immediately discovered his state of intoxication but nothing else, except his extreme politeness and the tense whiteness of his face.

Two of the three men who were keeping him in view tried, at various moments, to scrape acquaintance with him in the lobby, and at the bar; and without any success.

The last man, who had again stepped into an adjoining booth while McKay was telephoning, succeeded, by inquiring for McKay at the desk and waiting there while he was being paged.

The card on which this third man of the trio had written bore the name Stanley Brown; and when McKay hailed the page and perused the written name of his visitor he walked carefully back to the lobby——not too fast, because he seemed to realise that his legs, at that time, would not take kindly to speed.

In the lobby the third man approached him:

"Mr. McKay?"

"Mr. Brown?"

"A. I. O. agent," said Brown in a low voice. "You telephoned to Major Biddle, I believe."

McKay inspected him with profound gravity:

"How do," he said. "Ve' gla', m'sure. Ve' kind 'f'you come way up here see me. But I gotta see Major Biddle."

"I understand. Major Biddle has asked me to meet you and bring you to him."

"Oh. Ve' kind, 'm'sure. Gotta see Major. Confidential. Can' tell anybody 'cep Major."

"The Major will meet us at the Plaza this evening," explained Brown. "Meanwhile, if you will do me the honour of dining with me——"

"Ve' kind. Pleasure, 'm'sure. Have li'l drink, Mr. Brown?"

"Not here," murmured Brown. "I'm not in uniform, but I'm known."

"Quite so. Unnerstan' perfec'ly. Won'do. No."

"Had you thought of dressing for dinner?" inquired Mr. Brown carelessly.

McKay nodded, went over to the desk and got his key. But when he returned to Brown he only laughed and shoved the key into his pocket.

"Forgot," he explained. "Just came over. Haven't any clothes. Got these in Christiania. Ellis Island style. 'S'all I've got. Good overcoat though." He fumbled at his fur coat as he stood there, slightly swaying.

"We'll get a drink where I'm not known," said Brown. "I'll find a taxi."

"Ve' kind," murmured McKay, following him unsteadily to the swinging doors that opened on Long Acre, now so dimly lighted that it was scarcely recognisable.

An icy blast greeted them from the darkness, refreshing McKay for a moment; but in the freezing taxi he sank back as though weary, pulling his beaver coat around him and closing his battered eyes.

"Had a hard time," he muttered. "Feel done in. . . . Prisoner. . . . Gottaway. . . . Three months making Dutch border. . . . Hell. Tell Major all 'bout it. Great secret."

"What secret is that?" asked Brown, peering at him intently through the dim light, where he swayed in the corner with every jolt of the taxi.

"Sorry, m'dear fellow. Mussn' ask me that. Gotta tell Major n'no one else."

"But I am the Major's confidential——"

"Sorry. You'll 'scuse me, 'm'sure. Can't talk, Misser Brow!—'gret 'ceedingly 'cessity reticence. Unnerstan'?"

The taxi stopped before a vaguely lighted saloon on Fifty-ninth Street east of Fifth Avenue. McKay opened his eyes, looked around him in the bitter darkness, stumbled out into the snow on Brown's arm.

"A quiet, cosy little café," said Brown, "where I don't mind joining you in something hot before dinner."

"Thasso? Fine! Hot Scotch ve' good 'n'cold day. We'll havva l'il drink keep us warm 'n'snug."

A few respectable-looking men were drinking beer in the café as they entered a little room beyond, where a waiter came to them and took Brown's orders.

Hours later McKay seemed to be no more intoxicated than he had been; no more loquacious or indiscreet. He had added nothing to what he had already disclosed, boasted no more volubly about the "great secret," as he called it.

Now and then he recollected himself and inquired for the "Major," but a drink always sidetracked him.

It was evident, too, that Brown was becoming uneasy and impatient to the verge of exasperation, and that he was finally coming to the conclusion that

he could do nothing with the man McKay as far as pumping was concerned.

Twice, on pretexts, he left McKay alone in the small room and went into the café, where his two companions of the Hotel Astor were seated at a table, discussing sardine sandwiches and dark brew.

"I can't get a damned thing out of him," he said in a low voice. "Who the hell he is and where he comes from is past me. Had I better fix him and take his key?"

"Yess," nodded one of the other men, "it iss perhaps better that we search now his luggage in his room."

"I guess that's all we can hope for from this guy. Say! He's a clam. And he may be only a jazzer at that."

"He comes on the *Peer Gynt* this morning. We shall not forget that alretty, nor how he iss calling at those telephones all afternoon."

"He may be a nosey newspaper man—just a fresh souse," said Brown. "All the same I think I'll fix him and we'll go see what he's got in his room."

The two men rose, paid their reckoning, and went out; Brown returned to the small room, where McKay sat at the table with his curly brown head buried in his arms.

He did not look up immediately when Brown returned—time for the latter to dose the steaming tumbler at the man's elbow, and slip the little bottle back into his pocket.

Then, thinking McKay might be asleep, he nudged

him, and the young man lifted his marred and dissipated visage and extended one hand for his glass.

They both drank.

"Wheresa Major?" inquired McKay. "Gotta see him rightaway. Great secreksh——"

"Take a nap. You're tired."

"Yess'm all in," muttered the other. "Had a hard time—prisoner—three—three months hiding——" His head fell on his arms again.

Brown rose from his chair, bent over him, remained poised above his shoulder for a few moments. Then he coolly took the key from McKay's overcoat pocket and very deftly continued the search, in spite of the drowsy restlessness of the other.

But there were no papers, no keys, only a chequebook and a wallet packed with new banknotes and some foreign gold and silver. Brown merely read the name written in the new cheque-book but did not take it or the money.

Then, his business with McKay being finished, he went out, paid the reckoning, tipped the waiter generously, and said:

"My friend wants to sleep for half an hour. Let him alone until I come back for him."

Brown had been gone only a few moments when McKay lifted his head from his arms with a jerk, looked around him blindly, got to his feet and appeared in the café doorway, swaying on unsteady legs.

"Gotta see the Major!" he said thickly. " 'M'not qui' well. Gotta——"

The waiter attempted to quiet him, but McKay

continued on toward the door, muttering that he had to find the Major and that he was not feeling well.

They let him go out into the freezing darkness. Between the saloon and the Plaza Circle he fell twice on the ice, but contrived to find his feet again and lurch on through the deserted street and square.

The black cold that held the city in its iron grip had driven men and vehicles from the streets. On Fifth Avenue scarcely a moving light was to be seen; under the fuel-conservation order, club, hotel and private mansion were unlighted at that hour. The vast marble mass of the Plaza Hotel loomed enormous against the sky; the New Netherlands, the Savoy, the Metropolitan Club, the great Vanderbilt mansion, were darkened. Only a few ice-dimmed lamps clustered around the Plaza fountain, where the bronze goddess, with her basket of ice, made a graceful and shadowy figure under the stars.

The young man was feeling very ill now. His fur overcoat had become unbuttoned and the bitter wind that blew across the Park seemed to benumb his body and fetter his limbs so that he could barely keep his feet.

He had managed to cross Fifth Avenue, somehow; but now he stumbled against the stone balustrade which surrounds the fountain, and he rested there, striving to keep his feet.

Blindness, then deafness possessed him. Stupefied, instinct still aided him automatically in his customary habit of fighting; he strove to beat back the mounting waves of lethargy; half-conscious, he still fought for consciousness.

After a while his hat fell off. He was on his knees now, huddled under his overcoat, his left shoulder resting against the balustrade. Twice one arm moved as though seeking something. It was the mind's last protest against the betrayal of the body. Then the body became still, although the soul still lingered within it.

But now it had become a question of minutes—not many minutes. Fate had knocked him out; Destiny was counting him out—had nearly finished counting. Then Chance stepped into the squared circle of Life. And Kay McKay was in a very bad way indeed when a coupé, speeding northward through the bitter night, suddenly veered westward, ran in to the curb, and stopped; and Miss Erith's chauffeur turned in his seat at the wheel to peer back through the glass at his mistress, whose signal he had just obeyed.

Then he scrambled out of his seat and came around to the door, just as Miss Erith opened it and hurriedly descended.

"Wayland," she said, "there's somebody over there on the sidewalk. Can't you see?—there by the marble railing?—by the fountain! Whoever it is will freeze to death. Please go over and see what is the matter."

The heavily-furred chauffeur ran across the snowy oval. Miss Erith saw him lean over the shadowy, prostrate figure, shake it; then she hurried over too, and saw a man, crouching, fallen forward on his face beside the snowy balustrade.

Down on her knees in the snow beside him dropped Miss Erith, calling on Wayland to light a match.

"Is he dead, Miss?"

"No. Listen to him breathe! He's ill. Can't you hear the dreadful sounds he makes? Try to lift him, if you can. He's freezing here!"

"I'm thinkin' he's just drunk an' snorin,' Miss."

"What of it? He's freezing, too. Carry him to the car!"

Wayland leaned down, put both big arms under the shoulders of the unconscious man, and dragged him, upright, holding him by main strength.

"He's drunk, all right, Miss," the chauffeur remarked with a sniff of disgust.

That he had been drinking was evident enough to Miss Erith now. She picked up his hat; a straggling yellow light from the ice-bound lamps fell on McKay's battered features.

"Get him into the car," she said, "he'll die out here in this cold."

The big chauffeur half-carried, half-dragged the inanimate man to the car and lifted him in. Miss Erith followed.

"The Samaritan Hospital—that's the nearest," she said hastily. "Drive as fast as you can, Wayland."

McKay had slid to the floor of the coupé; Miss Erith turned on the ceiling light, drew the fur robe around him, and lifted his head to her knees, holding it there supported between her gloved hands.

The light fell full on his bruised visage, on the crisp brown hair dusted with snow, which lay so

lightly on his temples, making him seem very frail and boyish in his deathly pallor.

His breathing grew heavier, more laboured; the coupé reeked with the stench of alcohol; and Miss Erith, feeling almost faint, opened the window a little way, then wrapped the young man's head in the skirt of her fur coat and covered his icy hands with her own.

The ambulance entrance to the Samaritan Hospital was dimly illuminated. Wayland, turning in from Park Avenue, sounded his horn, then scrambled down from the box as an orderly and a watchman appeared under the vaulted doorway. And in a few moments the emergency case had passed out of Miss Erith's jurisdiction.

But as her car turned homeward, upon her youthful mind was stamped the image of a pale, bruised face—of a boyish head reversed upon her knees—of crisp, light-brown hair dusted with particles of snow.

Within the girl's breast something deep was stirring—something unfamiliar—not pain—not pity—yet resembling both, perhaps. She had no other standard of comparison.

After she reached home she called up the Samaritan Hospital for information, and learned that the man was suffering from the effects of alcohol and chloral—the latter probably an overdose self-administered—because he had not been robbed. Miss Erith also learned that there were five hundred dollars in new United States banknotes in his pockets, some English sovereigns, a number of Dutch and

Danish silver pieces, and a new cheque-book on the Schuyler National Bank, in which was written what might be his name.

"Will he live?" inquired Miss Erith, solicitous, as are people concerning the fate of anything they have helped to rescue.

"He seems to be in no danger," came the answer. "Are you interested in the patient, Miss Erith?"

"No—that is—yes. Yes, I am interested."

"Shall we communicate with you in case any unfavourable symptoms appear?"

"Please do!"

"Are you a relative or friend?"

"N-no. I am very slightly interested—in his recovery. Nothing more."

"Very well. But we do not find his name in any directory. We have attempted to communicate with his family, but nobody of that name claims him. You say you are personally interested in the young man?"

"Oh, no," said Miss Erith, "except that I hope he is not going to die. . . . He seems so—young—f-friendless——"

"Then you have no personal knowledge of the patient?"

"None whatever. . . . What did you say his name is?"

"McKay."

For a moment the name sounded oddly familiar but meaningless in her ears. Then, with a thrill of sudden recollection, she asked again for the man's name.

"The name written in his cheque-book is McKay."

"McKay!" she repeated incredulously. "What else?"

"Kay."

"*What! ! !*"

"That is the name in the cheque-book—Kay McKay."

Dumb, astounded, she could not utter a word.

"Do you know anything about him, Miss Erith?" inquired the distant voice.

"Yes-yes! . . . I don't know whether I do. . . . I have heard the—that name—a similar name——" Her mind was in a tumult now. Could such a thing happen? It was utterly impossible!

The voice on the wire continued:

"The police have been here but they are not interested in the case, as no robbery occurred. The young man is still unconscious, suffering from the chloral. If *you* are interested, Miss Erith, would you kindly call at the hospital to-morrow?"

"Yes. . . . Did you say that there was *foreign* money in his pockets?"

"Dutch and Danish silver and English gold."

"Thank you. . . . I shall call to-morrow. Don't let him leave before I arrive."

"What?"

"I wish to see him. Please do not permit him to leave before I get there. It—it is very important—vital—in case he is the man—the Kay McKay in question."

"Very well. Good-night."

Miss Erith sank back in her armchair, shivering even in the warm glow from the hearth.

"Such things can *not* happen!" she said aloud. "Such things do not happen in life!"

And she told herself that even in stories no author would dare—not even the veriest amateur scribbler—would presume to affront intelligent readers by introducing such a coincidence as this appeared to be.

"Such things do *not* happen!" repeated Miss Erith firmly.

Such things, however, *do* occur.

Was it possible that the Great Secret, of which the Lauffer cipher letter spoke, was locked within the breast of this young fellow who now lay unconscious in the Samaritan Hospital?

Was this actually the escaped prisoner? Was this the man who, according to instructions in the cipher, was to be marked for death at the hands of the German Government's secret agents in America?

And, if this truly were the same man, was he safe, at least for the present, now that the cipher letter had been intercepted before it had reached Herman Lauffer?

Hour after hour, lying deep in her armchair before the fire, Miss Erith crouched a prey to excited conjectures, not one of which could be answered until the man in the Samaritan Hospital had recovered consciousness.

Suppose he never recovered consciousness. Suppose he should die——

At the thought Miss Erith sprang from her chair and picked up the telephone.

With fast-beating heart she waited for the connection. Finally she got it and asked the question.

"The man is dying," came the calm answer. A pause, then: "I understand the patient has just died."

Miss Erith strove to speak but her voice died in her throat. Trembling from head to foot, she placed the telephone on the table, turned uncertainly, fell into the armchair, huddled there, and covered her face with both hands.

For it was proving worse—a little worse than the loss of the Great Secret—worse than the mere disappointment in losing it—worse even than a natural sorrow in the defeat of an effort to save life.

For in all her own life Miss Erith had never until that evening experienced the slightest emotion when looking into the face of any man.

But from the moment when her brown eyes fell upon the pallid, dissipated, marred young face turned upward on her knees in the car—in that instant she had known for the first time a new and indefinable emotion—vague in her mind, vaguer in her heart—yet delicately apparent.

But what this unfamiliar emotion might be, so faint, so vague, she had made no effort to analyse. . . . It had been there; she had experienced it; that was all she knew.

It was almost morning before she rose, stiff with cold, and moved slowly toward her bedroom.

Among the whitening ashes on her hearth only a single coal remained alive.

CHAPTER III

TO A FINISH

THE hospital called her on the telephone about eight o'clock in the morning:

"Miss Evelyn Erith, please?"

"Yes," she said in a tired voice, "who is it?"

"Is this Miss Erith?"

"Yes."

"This is the Superintendent's office, Samaritan Hospital, Miss Dalton speaking."

The girl's heart contracted with a pang of sheer pain. She closed her eyes and waited. The voice came over the wire again:

"A wreath of Easter lilies with your card came early—this morning. I'm very sure there is a mistake——"

"No," she whispered, "the flowers are for a patient who died in the hospital last night—a young man whom I brought there in my car—Kay McKay."

"I was afraid so——"

"What!"

"McKay isn't dead! It's another patient. I was sure somebody here had made a mistake."

Miss Erith swayed slightly, steadied herself with a desperate effort to comprehend what the voice was telling her.

"There was a mistake made last night," continued

Miss Dalton. "Another patient died—a similar case. When I came on duty a few moments ago I learned what had occurred. The young man in whom you are interested is conscious this morning. Would you care to see him before he is discharged?"

Miss Erith said, unsteadily, that she would.

She had recovered her self-command but her knees remained weak and her lips tremulous, and she rested her forehead on both hands which had fallen, tightly clasped, on the table in front of her. After a few moments she felt better and she rang up her D. C., Mr. Vaux, and explained that she expected to be late at the office. After that she got the garage on the wire, ordered her car, and stood by the window watching the heavily falling snow until her butler announced the car's arrival.

The shock of the message informing her that this man was still alive now rapidly absorbed itself in her reviving excitement at the prospect of an approaching interview with him. Her car ran cautiously along Park Avenue through the driving snow, but the distance was not far and in a few minutes the great red quadrangle of the Samaritan Hospital loomed up on her right. And even before she was ready, before she quite had time to compose her mind in preparation for the questions she had begun to formulate, she was ushered into a private room by a nurse on duty who detained her a moment at the door:

"The patient is ready to be discharged," she whispered, "but we have detained him at your request. We are so sorry about the mistake."

"Is he quite conscious?"

"Entirely. He's somewhat shaken, that is all. Otherwise he shows no ill effects."

"Does he know how he came here?"

"Oh, yes. He questioned us this morning and we told him the circumstances."

"Does he know I have arrived?"

"Yes, I told him."

"He did not object to seeing me?" inquired Miss Erith. A slight colour dyed her face.

"No, he made no objection. In fact, he seemed interested. He expects you. You may go in."

Miss Erith stepped into the room. Perhaps the patient had heard the low murmur of voices in the corridor, for he lay on his side in bed gazing attentively toward the door. Miss Erith walked straight to the bedside; he looked up at her in silence.

"I am so glad that you are better," she said with an effort made doubly difficult in the consciousness of the bright blush on her cheeks. Without moving he replied in what must have once been an agreeable voice: "Thank you. I suppose you are Miss Erith."

"Yes."

"Then—I am very grateful for what you have done."

"It was so fortunate——"

"Would you be seated if you please?"

She took the chair beside his bed.

"It was nice of you," he said, almost sullenly. "Few women of your sort would bother with a drunken man."

They both flushed. She said calmly: "It is women of my sort who *do* exactly that kind of thing."

He gave her a dark and sulky look: "Not often," he retorted: "there are few of your sort from Samaria."

There was a silence, then he went on in a hard voice:

"I'd been drinking a lot . . . as usual. . . . But it isn't an excuse when I say that my beastly condition was not due to a drunken stupor. It just didn't happen to be that time."

She shivered slightly. "It happened to be due to chloral," he added, reddening painfully again. "I merely wished you to know."

"Yes, they told me," she murmured.

After another silence, during which he had been watching her askance, he said: "Did you think I had taken that chloral voluntarily?"

She made no reply. She sat very still, conscious of vague pain somewhere in her breast, acquiescent in the consciousness, dumb, and now incurious concerning further details of this man's tragedy.

"Sometimes," he said, "the poor devil who, in chloral, seeks a refuge from intolerable pain becomes an addict to the drug. . . . I do not happen to be an addict. I want you to understand that."

The painful colour came and went in the girl's face; he was now watching her intently.

"As a matter of fact, but probably of no interest to you," he continued, "I did not voluntarily take that chloral. It was administered to me without my knowledge—when I was more or less stupid with liquor. . . . It is what is known as knockout drops, and is employed by crooks to stupefy men who are

more or less intoxicated so that they may be easily robbed."

He spoke now so calmly and impersonally that the girl had turned to look at him again as she listened. And now she said: "Were you robbed?"

"They took my hotel key: nothing else."

"Was that a serious matter, Mr. McKay?"

He studied her with narrowing brown eyes.

"Oh, no," he said. "I had nothing of value in my room at the Astor except a few necessaries in a steamer-trunk. . . . Thank you so much for all your kindness to me, Miss Erith," he added, as though relieving her of the initiative in terminating the interview.

As he spoke he caught her eye and divined somehow that she did not mean to go just yet. Instantly he was on his guard, lying there with partly closed lids, awaiting events, though not yet really suspicious. But at her next question he rose abruptly, supported on one elbow, his whole frame tense and alert under the bed-coverings as though gathered for a spring.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

"I asked you how long ago you escaped from Holzminden camp?" repeated the girl, very pale.

"Who told you I had ever been there?—wherever that is!"

"You were there as a prisoner, were you not, Mr. McKay?"

"Where is that place?"

"In Germany on the River Weser. You were detained there under pretence of being an Englishman

before we declared war on Germany. After we declared war they held you as a matter of course."

There was an ugly look in his eyes, now: "You seem to know a great deal about a drunkard you picked up in the snow near the Plaza fountain last night."

"Please don't speak so bitterly."

Quite unconsciously her gloved hand crept up on her fur coat until it rested over her heart, pressing slightly against her breast. Neither spoke for a few moments. Then:

"I do know something about you, Mr. McKay," she said. "Among other things I know that—that if you have become—become intemperate—it is not your fault. . . . That was vile of them—unutterably wicked—to do what they did to you——"

"Who are you?" he burst out. "Where have you learned—heard such things? Did I babble all this?"

"You did not utter a sound!"

"Then—in God's name——"

"Oh, yes, yes!" she murmured, "in God's name. That is why you and I are here together—in God's name and by His grace. Do you know He wrought a miracle for you and me—here in New York, in these last hours of this dreadful year that is dying very fast now?

"Do you know what that miracle is? Yes, it's partly the fact that you did not die last night out there on the street. Thirteen degrees below zero! . . . And you did not die. . . . And the other part of the miracle is that I of all people in the world

should have found you! . . . That is our miracle."

Somehow he divined that the girl did not mean the mere saving of his life had been part of this miracle. But she had meant that, too, without realising she meant it.

"Who are you?" he asked very quietly.

"I'll tell you: I am Evelyn Erith, a volunteer in the C. E. D. Service of the United States."

He drew a deep breath, sank down on his elbow, and rested his head on the pillow.

"Still I don't see how you know," he said. "I mean—the beastly details——"

"I'll tell you some time. I read the history of your case in an intercepted cipher letter. Before the German agent here had received and decoded it he was arrested by an agent of another Service. If there is anything more to be learned from him it will be extracted.

"But of all men on earth you are the one man I wanted to find. There is the miracle: I found you! Even now I can scarcely force myself to believe it is really you."

The faintest flicker touched his eyes.

"What did you want of me?" he inquired.

"Help."

"Help? From such a man as I? What sort of help do you expect from a drunkard?"

"Every sort. All you can give. All you can give."

He looked at her wearily; his face had become pallid again; the dark hollows of dissipation showed like bruises.

"I don't understand," he said. "I'm no good, you know that. I'm done in, finished. I couldn't help you with your work if I wanted to. There's nothing left of me. I am not to be depended on."

And suddenly, in his eyes of a boy, his self-hatred was revealed to her in one savage gleam.

"No good," he muttered feverishly, "not to be trusted—no will-power left. . . . It was in me, I suppose, to become the drunkard I am——"

"You are *not!*" cried the girl fiercely. "Don't say it!"

"Why not? I am!"

"You can fight your way free!" His laugh frightened her.

"Fight? I've done that. They tried to pump me that way, too—tried to break me—break my brain to pieces—by stopping my liquor. . . . I suppose they thought I might really go insane, as they gave it back after a while—after a few centuries in hell—and tried to make me talk by other methods——"

"Don't, please." She turned her head swiftly, unable to control her quivering face.

"Why not?"

"I can't bear it."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shock you."

"I know." She sat for a while with head averted; and presently spoke, sitting so:

"We'll fight it, anyway," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"If you'll let me——"

After a silence she turned and looked at him. He stammered, very red:

"I don't quite know why you speak to me so."

She herself was not entirely clear on that point, either. After all, her business with this man was to use him in the service of her Government."

"What is *The Great Secret?*" she asked calmly.

After a long while he said, lying there very still: "So you have even heard about that."

"I have heard about it; that is all."

"Do you know what it is?"

"All I know about it is that there is such a thing—something known to certain Germans, and by them spoken of as *The Great Secret.* I imagine, of course, that it is some vital military secret which they desire to guard."

"Is that all you know about it?"

"No, not all." She looked at him gravely out of very clear, honest eyes:

"I know, also, that the Berlin Government has ordered its agents to discover your whereabouts, and to 'silence' you."

He gazed at her quite blandly for a moment, then, to her amazement, he laughed—such a clear, untroubled, boyish laugh that her constrained expression softened in sympathy.

"Do you think that Berlin doesn't mean it?" she asked, brightening a little.

"Mean it? Oh, I'm jolly sure Berlin means it!"

"Then why——"

"Why do I laugh?"

"Well—yes. Why do you? It does not strike me as very humorous."

At that he laughed again—laughed so whole-

heartedly, so delightfully, that the winning smile curved her own lips once more.

"Would you tell me why you laugh?" she inquired.

"I don't know. It seems so funny—those Huns, those Boches, already smeared from hair to feet with blood—pausing in their wholesale butchery to devise a plan to murder *me!*"

His face altered; he raised himself on one elbow:

"The swine have turned all Europe into a bloody wallow. They're belly-deep in it—Kaiser and knecht! But that's only part of it. They're destroying souls by millions! . . . Mine is already damned."

Miss Erith sprang to her feet: "I tell you not to say such a thing!" she cried, exasperated. "You're as young as I am! Besides, souls are not slain by murder. If they perish it's suicide, *always!*"

She began to pace the white room nervously, flinging open her fur coat as she turned and came straight back to his bed again. Standing there and looking down at him she said:

"We've got to fight it out. The country needs you. It's your bit and you've got to do it. There's a cure for alcoholism—Dr. Langford's cure. Are you afraid because you think it may hurt?"

He lay looking up at her with hell's own glimmer in his eyes again:

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said. "You talk of cures, and I tell you that I'm half dead for a drink right now! And I'm going to get up and dress and get it!"

The expression of his features and his voice and

words appalled her, left her dumb for an instant. Then she said breathlessly:

"You won't do that!"

"Yes I will."

"No."

"Why not?" he demanded excitedly.

"You owe me something."

"What I said was conventional. I'm *not* grateful to you for saving the sort of life mine is!"

"I was not thinking of your life."

After a moment he said more quietly: "I know what you mean. . . . Yes, I am grateful. Our Government ought to know."

"Then tell me, now."

"You know," he said brutally, "I have only your word that you are what you say you are."

She reddened but replied calmly: "That is true. Let me show you my credentials."

From her muff she drew a packet, opened it, and laid the contents on the bedspread under his eyes. Then she walked to the window and stood there with her back turned looking out at the falling snow.

After a few minutes he called her. She went back to the bedside, replaced the packet in her muff, and stood waiting in silence.

He lay looking up at her very quietly and his bruised young features had lost their hard, sullen expression.

"I'd better tell you all I know," he said, "because there is really no hope of curing me . . . you don't understand . . . my will-power is gone. The trouble is with my mind itself. I don't want to be

cured. . . . I *want* what's killing me. I want it now, always, all the time. So before anything happens to me I'd better tell you what I know so that our Government can make the proper investigation. Because what I shall tell you is partly a surmise. I leave it to you to judge—to our Government."

She drew from her muff a little pad and a pencil and seated herself on the chair beside him.

"I'll speak slowly," he began, but she shook her head, saying that she was an expert stenographer. So he went on:

"You know my name—Kay McKay. I was born here and educated at Yale. But my father was Scotch and he died in Scotland. My mother had been dead many years. They lived on a property called Isla which belonged to my grandfather. After my father's death my grandfather allowed me an income, and when I had graduated from Yale I continued here taking various post-graduate courses. Finally I went to Cornell and studied agriculture, game breeding and forestry—desiring some day to have a place of my own.

"In 1914 I went to Germany to study their system of forestry. In July of that year I went to Switzerland and roamed about in the vagabond way I like —once liked." His visage altered and he cast a side glance at the girl beside him, but her eyes were fixed on her pad.

He drew a deep breath, like a sigh:

"In that corner of Switzerland which is thrust westward between Germany and France there are a lot of hills and mountains which were unfamiliar to

me. The flora resembled that of the Vosges—so did the bird and insect life except on the higher mountains.

"There is a mountain called Mount Terrible. I camped on it. There was some snow. You know what happens sometimes in summer on the higher peaks. Well, it happened to me—the whole snow field slid when I was part way across it—and I thought it was all off—never dreamed a man could live through that sort of thing—with the sheer gneiss ledges below!

"It was not a big avalanche—not the terrific thundering sort—rather an easy slipping, I fancy—but it was a devilish thing to lie aboard, and, of course, if there had been precipices where I slid——" He shrugged.

The girl looked up from her shorthand manuscript; he seemed to be dreamily living over in his mind those moments on Mount Terrible. Presently he smiled slightly:

"I was horribly scared—smothered, choked, half-senseless. . . . Part of the snow and a lot of trees and boulders went over the edge of something with a roar like Niagara. . . . I don't know how long afterward it was when I came to my senses.

"I was in a very narrow, rocky valley, up to my neck in soft snow, and the sun beating on my face. . . . So I crawled out . . . I wasn't hurt; I was merely lost.

"It took me a long while to place myself geographically. But finally, by map and compass, I concluded that I was in some one of the innumerable

narrow valleys on the northern side of Mount Terrible. Basle seemed to be the nearest proper objective, judging from my map. . . . Can you form a mental picture of that particular corner of Europe, Miss Erith?"

"No."

"Well, the German frontier did not seem to be very far northward—at least that was my idea. But there was no telling; the place where I landed was a savage and shaggy wilderness of firs and rocks without any sign of habitation or of roads.

"The things that had been strapped on my back naturally remained with me—map, binoculars, compass, botanising paraphernalia, rations for two days—that sort of thing. So I was not worried. I prowled about, experienced agreeable shivers by looking up at the mountain which had dumped me down into this valley, and finally, after eating, I started northeast by compass.

"It was a rough scramble. After I had been hiking along for several hours I realised that I was on a shelf high above another valley, and after a long while I came out where I could look down over miles of country. My map indicated that what I beheld must be some part of Alsace. Well, I lay flat on a vast shelf of rock and began to use my field-glasses."

He was silent so long that Miss Erith finally looked up questioningly. McKay's face had become white and stern, and in his fixed gaze there was something dreadful.

"Please," she faltered, "go on."

He looked at her absently; the colour came back to his face; he shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, yes. What was I saying? Yes—about that vast ledge up there under the mountains . . . I stayed there three days. Partly because I couldn't find any way down. There seemed to be none.

"But I was not bored. Oh, no. Just anxious concerning my situation. Otherwise I had plenty to look at."

She waited, pencil poised.

"Plenty to look at," he repeated absently. "Plenty of Huns to gaze at. Huns? They were like ants below me, there. They swarmed under the mountain ledge as far as I could see—thousands of busy Boches—busy as ants. There were narrow-gauge railways, too, apparently running right into the mountain; and a deep broad cleft, deep as another valley, and all crawling with Huns.

"A tunnel? Nobody alive ever dreamed of such a gigantic tunnel, if it was one! . . . Well, I was up there three days. It was the first of August—thereabouts—and I'd been afield for weeks. And, of course, I'd heard nothing of war—never dreamed of it.

"If I had, perhaps what those thousands of Huns were doing along the mountain wall might have been plainer to me.

"As it was, I couldn't guess. There was no blasting—none that I could hear. But trains were running and some gigantic enterprise was being accomplished—some enterprise that apparently demanded speed and privacy—for not one civilian was to be

seen, not one dwelling. But there were endless mazes of fortifications; and I saw guns being moved everywhere.

"Well, I was becoming hungry up on that fir-clad battlement. I didn't know how to get down into the valley. It began to look as though I'd have to turn back; and that seemed a rather awful prospect.

"Anyway, what happened, eventually, was this: I started east through the forest along that pathless tableland, and on the afternoon of the next day, tired out and almost starved, I stepped across the Swiss boundary line—a wide, rocky, cleared space crossing a mountain flank like a giant's road.

"No guards were visible anywhere, no sentry-boxes, but, as I stood hesitating in the middle of the frontier—and just why I hesitated I don't know—I saw half a dozen jägers of a German mounted regiment ride up on the German side of the boundary.

"For a second the idea occurred to me that they had ridden parallel to the ledge to intercept me; but the idea seemed absurd, granted even that they had seen me upon the ledge from below, which I never dreamed they had. So when they made me friendly gestures to come across the frontier I returned their cheery 'Grüss Gott!' and plodded thankfully across. . . . And their leader, leaning from his saddle to take my offered hand, suddenly struck me in the face, and at the same moment a trooper behind me hit me on the head with the butt of a pistol."

The girl's flying pencil faltered; she lifted her brown eyes, waiting.

"That's about all," he said—"as far as facts are concerned. . . . They treated me rather badly. . . . I faced their firing-squads half-a-dozen times. After that bluff wouldn't work they interned me as an English civilian at Holzminden. . . . They hid me when, at last, an inspection took place. No chance for me to communicate with our Ambassador or with any of the Commission."

He turned to her in his boyish, frank way: "But do you know, Miss Erith, it took me quite a while to analyse the affair and to figure out why they arrested me, lied about me, and treated me so hellishly.

"You see, I was kept in solitary confinement and never had a chance to speak to any of the other civilians interned there at Holzminden. There was no way of suspecting why all this was happening to me except by the attitude of the Huns themselves and their endless questions and threats and cruelties. They were cruel. They hurt me a lot."

Miss Erith's eyes suddenly dimmed as she watched him, and she hastily bent her head over the pad.

"Well," he went on, "the rest, as I say, is pure surmise. This is my conclusion: I think that for the last forty years the Huns have been busy with an astounding military enterprise. Of course, since 1870, the Boche has expected war, and has been feverishly preparing for it. All the world now knows what they have done—not everything that they have done, however.

"My conclusion is this: that, when Mount Terrible shrugged me off its northern flank, the snow slide carried me to an almost inaccessible spot of

which even the Swiss hunters knew nothing. Or, if they did, they considered it impossible to reach from their own territory.

"From Germany it could be reached, but it was Swiss territory. At any rate I think I am the only civilian who has been there, and who has viewed from there this enormous work in which the Huns are engaged.

"And I belive that this mysterious, overwhelmingly enormous work is nothing less than the piercing —not of a mountain or a group of mountains—but of that entire part of Switzerland which lies between Germany and France.

"I believe that a vast military road, deep, deep, under the earth, is being carried by an enormous tunnel from far back on the German side of the frontier, under Mount Terrible, under all the mountains, hills, valleys, forests, rivers—under Switzerland, in fact—into French territory.

"I believe it has been building since 1871. I believe it is nearly finished, and that it will, on French territory, give egress to a Hun army debouching from Alsace, under Switzerland, into France behind the French lines. That part of the Franco-Swiss frontier is unguarded, unfortified, uninhabited. From there a Hun army can strike the French trenches from the rear—strike Toul, Nancy, Belfort, Verdun —why, the road is open to Paris that way—open to Calais, to England!"

"This is frightful!" cried the girl. "If such a dreadful——"

"Wait! I told you that it is merely a surmise.

I don't know. I guess. Why I guess it I have told you. . . . They were savage with me—those Huns. . . . They got nothing out of me. I lied steadily, even when drunk. No, they got nothing out of me. I denied I had seen anything. I denied —and truly enough—that anybody had accompanied me. No, they wrenched nothing out of me—not by starving me, not by water torture, not by their firing-squads, not by blows, not even by making of me the drunkard I am."

The pencil fell from Miss Erith's hand and the hand caught McKay's, held it, crushed it.

"You're only a boy," she murmured. "I'm not much more than a girl. We've both got years ahead of us—the best of our lives."

"*You* have."

"You also! Oh, don't, don't look at me that way. I'll help you. We've got work to do, you and I. Don't you see? Don't you understand? Work to do for our Government! Work to do for America!"

"It's too late for me to——"

"No. You've got to live. You've got to find yourself again. This depends on you. Don't you see it does? Don't you see that you have got to go back there and *prove* what you merely suspect?"

"I simply can't."

"You shall! I'll make this right with you! I'll stick to you! I'll fight to give you back your will-power—your mind. We'll do this together, for our country. I'll give up everything else to make this fight."

He began to tremble.

"I—if I could——"

"I tell you that you shall! We must do our bit, you and I!"

"You don't know—you don't know!" he cried in a bitter voice, then fell trembling again with the sweat of agony on his face.

"No, I don't know," she whispered, clutching his hand to steady him. "But I shall learn."

"You'll learn that a drunkard is a dirty beast!" he cried. "Do you know what I'd do if anybody tried to keep me from drink? *Anybody!*—even you!"

"No, I don't know." She shook her head sorrowfully: "A mindless man becomes a demon, I suppose. . . . Would you—injure me?"

He was shaking all over now, and presently he sat up in bed and covered his head with one desperate hand.

"You poor boy!" she whispered.

"Keep away from me," he muttered, "I've told you all I know. I'm no further use. . . . Keep clear of me. . . . I'm sorry—to be—what I am."

"When I leave what are you going to do?" she asked gently.

"Do? I'll dress and go to the nearest bar."

"Do you need it so much already?"

He nodded his bowed head covered by the hand that gripped his hair: "Yes, I need it—badly."

She rose, loosened his clutch on her slender hand, picked up her muff:

"I'll be waiting for you downstairs," she said simply.

His face expressed sullen defiance as he passed through the waiting-room. Yet he seemed a little taken aback as well as relieved when Miss Erith did not appear among the considerable number of people waiting there for discharged patients. He walked on, buttoning his fur coat with shaky fingers, passed the doorway and stepped out into the falling snow. At the same moment a chauffeur buried in coon-skins moved forward touching his cap:

"Miss Erith's car is here, sir; Miss Erith expects you."

McKay hesitated, scowling now in his perplexity; passed his quivering hand slowly across his face, then turned, and looked at the waiting car drawn up at the gutter. Behind the frosty window Miss Erith gave him a friendly smile. He walked over to the curb, the chauffeur opened the door, and McKay took off his hat.

"Don't ask me," he said in a low voice that trembled slightly like a sick man's.

"I *do* ask you."

"You know what's the matter with me, Miss Erith," he insisted in the same low, unsteady voice.

"Please," she said: and laid one small gloved hand lightly on his arm.

So he entered the car; the chauffeur drew the robe over them, and stood awaiting orders.

"Home," said Miss Erith faintly.

If McKay was astonished he did not betray it. Neither said anything more for a while. The man rested an elbow on the sill, his troubled, haggard face on his hand; the girl kept her gaze steadily in front

of her with a partly resolute, partly scared expression. The car went up Park Avenue and then turned westward.

When it stopped the girl said: "You will give me a few moments in my library with you, won't you?"

The visage he turned to her was one of physical anguish. They sat confronting each other in silence for an instant; then he rose with a visible effort and descended, and she followed.

"Be at the garage at two, Wayland," she said, and ascended the snowy stoop beside McKay.

The butler admitted them. "Luncheon for two," she said, and mounted the stairs without pausing.

McKay remained in the hall until he had been separated from hat and coat; then he slowly ascended the stairway. She was waiting on the landing and she took him directly into the library where a wood fire was burning.

"Just a moment," she said, "to make myself as —as persuasive as I can."

"You are perfectly equipped, Miss Erith——"

"Oh, no, I must do better than I have done. This is the great moment of our careers, Mr. McKay." Her smile, brightly forced, left his grim features unresponsive. The undertone in her voice warned him of her determination to have her way.

He took an involuntary step toward the door like a caged thing that sees a loophole, halted as she barred his way, turned his marred young visage and glared at her. There was something terrible in his intent gaze—a pale flare flickering in his eyes like the uncanny light in the orbs of a cornered beast.

"You'll wait, won't you?" she asked, secretly frightened now.

After a long interval, "Yes," his lips motioned.

"Thank you. Because it is the supreme moment of our lives. It involves life or death. . . . Be patient with me. Will you?"

"But you must be brief," he muttered restlessly. "You know what I need. I am sick, I tell you!"

So she went away—not to arrange her beauty more convincingly, but to fling coat and hat to her maid and drop down on the chair by her desk and take up the telephone:

"Dr. Langford's Hospital?"

"Yes."

"Miss Erith wishes to speak to Dr. Langford. . . . Is that you, Doctor? . . . Oh, yes, I'm perfectly well. . . . Tell me, how soon can you cure a man of—of dipsomania? . . . Of course. . . . It was a stupid question. But I'm so worried and unhappy . . . Yes. . . . Yes, it's a man I know. . . . It wasn't his fault, poor fellow. If I can only get him to you and persuade him to tell you the history of his case . . . I don't know whether he'll go. I'm doing my best. He's here in my library. . . . Oh, no, he isn't intoxicated now, but he was yesterday. And oh, Doctor! He is so shaky and he seems so ill—I mean in mind and spirit more than in body. . . . Yes, he says he needs something. . . . What? . . . Give him some whisky if he wants it? . . . Do you mean a highball? . . . How many? . . . Oh . . . Yes . . . Yes, I understand . . . I'll do my very best. . . . Thank you.

. . . At three o'clock? . . . Thank you so much, Doctor Langford. Good-bye!"

She hung up the receiver, took a look at herself in the dressing-glass, and saw reflected there a yellow-haired hazel-eyed girl who looked a trifle scared. But she forced a smile, made a hasty toilette and rang for the butler, gave her orders, and then walked leisurely into the library. McKay lifted his tragic face from his hands where he stood before the fire, his elbows resting on the mantel.

"Come," she said in her pretty, resolute way, "you and I are perfectly human. Let's face this thing together and find out what really is in it."

She took one armchair, he the other, and she noticed that all his frame was quivering now—his hands always in restless, groping movement, as though with palsy. A moment later the butler came with a decanter, ice, mineral water and a tall glass. There was also a box of cigars on the silver tray.

"You'll fix your own highball," she said carelessly, nodding dismissal to the butler. But she looked only once at McKay, then turned away—pretence of picking up her knitting—so terrible it was to her to see in his eyes the very glimmer of hell itself as he poured out what he "needed."

Minute after minute she sat there by the fire knitting tranquilly, scarcely ever even lifting her calm young eyes to the man. Twice again he poured out what he "needed" for himself before the agony in his sickened brain and body became endurable—before the tortured nerves had been sufficiently drugged once more and the indescribable torment

had subsided. He looked at her once or twice where she sat knitting and apparently quite oblivious to what he had been about, but his glance was no longer furtive; he unconsciously squared his shoulders, and his head straightened up.

Without lifting her eyes she said: "I thought we'd talk over our plans when you feel better."

He glanced sideways at the decanter: "I am all right," he said.

She had not yet lifted her eyes; she continued to knit while speaking:

"First of all," she said, "I shall place your testimony and my report in the hands of my superior, Mr. Vaux. Does that meet with your approval?"

"Yes."

She knitted in silence a few moments. He kept his eyes on her. Presently—and still without looking up—she said: "Are you within the draft age?"

"No. I am thirty-two."

"Will you volunteer?"

"No."

"Would you tell me why?"

"Yes, I'll tell you why. I shall not volunteer because of my habits."

"You mean your temporary infirmity," she said calmly. But her cheeks reddened and she bent lower over her work. A dull colour stained his face, too, but he merely shrugged his comment.

She said in a low voice: "I want you to volunteer with me for overseas service in the Army Intelligence Department. . . . You and I, together. . . . To prove what you have surmised concerning the Ger-

man operations beyond Mount Terrible. . . . And first I want you to go with me to Dr. Langford's hospital. . . . I want you to go this afternoon with me. . . . And face the situation. And see it through. And come out cured." She lifted her head and looked at him. "Will you?" And in his altering gaze she saw the flicker of half-senseless anger intensified suddenly to a flare of hatred.

"Don't ask anything like that of me," he said. She had grown quite white.

"I do ask it. . . . Will you?"

"If I wanted to I couldn't, and I don't want to. I prefer this hell to the other."

"Won't you make a fight for it?"

"No!" he said brutally.

The girl bent her head again over her knitting. But her white fingers remained idle. After a long while, staring at her intently, he saw her lip quiver.

"Don't do that!" he broke out harshly. "What the devil do you care?"

Then she lifted her tragic white face. And he had his answer.

"My God!" he faltered, springing to his feet. "What's the matter with you? Why do you care? You can't care! What is it to you that a drunken beast slinks back into hell again? Do you think you are Samaritan enough to follow him and try to drag him out by the ears? . . . A man whose very brain is already cracking with it all—a burnt-out thing with neither mind nor manhood left——"

She got to her feet, trembling and deathly white.

"I can't let you go," she whispered.

Exasperation almost strangled him and set afire his unhinged brain.

"For Christ's sake!" he cried. "What do you care?"

"I—I care," she stammered—"for Christ's sake . . . And yours!"

Things went dark before her eyes. . . . She opened them after a while on the sofa where he had carried her. He was standing looking down at her. . . . After a long while the ghost of a smile touched her lips. In his haunted gaze there was no response. But he said in an altered, unfamiliar voice: "I'll go if you say so. I'll do all that's in me to do. . . . Will you be there—for the first day or two?"

"Yes. . . . All day long. . . . Every day if you want me. Do you?"

"Yes. . . . But God knows what I may do to you. . . . There'll be somebody to—watch me—won't there? . . . I don't know what may happen to you or to myself. . . . I'm in a bad way, Miss Erith . . . I'm in a very bad way."

"I know," she murmured.

He said with an almost childish directness: "Do men always live through such cures? . . . I don't see how I can live through it."

She rose from the sofa and stood beside him, feeling still dizzy, still tremulous and lacking strength.

"Let us win through," she said, not looking at him. "I think you will suffer more than I shall. A little more. . . . Because I had rather feel pain than give it—rather suffer than look on suffering. . . . It will be very hard for us both, I fear."

Her butler announced luncheon.

CHAPTER IV

WRECKAGE

THE man had been desperately ill in soul and mind and body. And now in some curious manner the ocean seemed to be making him physically better but spiritually worse. Something, too, in the horizonwide waste of waters was having a sinister effect on his brain. The grey daylight of early May, bitter as December—the utter desolation, the mounting and raucous menace of the sea, were meddling with normal convalescence.

Dull animosity awoke in a battered mind not yet readjusted to the living world. What had these people done to him anyway? The sullen resentment which invaded him groped stealthily for a vent.

Was *this,* then, their cursed cure?—this foggy nightmare through which he moved like a shade in the realm of phantoms? Little by little what had happened to him was becoming an obsession, as he began to remember in detail. Now he brooded on it and looked askance at the girl who was primarily responsible—conscious in a confused sort of way that he was a blackguard for his ingratitude.

But his mind had been badly knocked about, and its limping machinery creaked.

"That meddling woman," he thought, knowing all the time what he owed her, remembering her cour-

age, her unselfishness, her loveliness. "Curse her!" he muttered, amid the shadows confusing his wounded mind.

Then a meaningless anger grew with him: She had him, now! he was trapped and caged. A girl who drags something floundering out of hell is entitled to the thing if she wants it. He admitted that to himself.

But how about that "cure"?

Was *this* it—this terrible blankness—this misty unreality of things? Surcease from craving—yes. But what to take its place—what to fill in, occupy mind and body? What sop to his restless soul? What had this young iconoclast offered him after her infernal era of destruction? A distorted world, a cloudy mind, the body-substance of a ghost? And for the magic world she had destroyed she offered him a void to live in—— Curse her!

There were no lights showing aboard the transport; all ports remained screened. Arrows, painted on the decks in luminous paint, pointed out the way. Below decks, a blue globe here and there emitted a feeble glimmer, marking corridors which pierced a depthless darkness.

No noise was permitted on board, no smoking, no other lights in cabin or saloon. There was scarcely a sound to be heard on the ship, save the throbbing of her engines, the long, splintering crash of heavy seas, and the dull creak of her steel vertebræ tortured by a million rivets.

As for the accursed ocean, that to McKay was the enemy paramount which had awakened him to

the stinging vagueness of things out of his stupid acquiescence in convalescence.

He hated the sea. It was becoming a crawling horror to him in its every protean phase, whether flecked with ghastly lights in storms or haunted by pallid shapes in colour—always, always it remained repugnant to him under its eternal curse of endless motion.

He loathed it: he detested the livid skies by day against which tossing waves showed black: he hated every wave at night and their ceaseless unseen motion. McKay had been "cured." McKay was very, very ill.

There came to him, at intervals, a girl who stole through the obscurity of the pitching corridors guiding him from one faint blue light to the next—a girl who groped out the way with him at night to the deck by following the painted arrows under foot. Also sometimes she sat at his bedside through the unreal flight of time, her hand clasped over his. He knew that he had been brutal to her during his "cure."

He was still rough with her at moments of intense mental pressure—somehow; realised it—made efforts toward self-command—toward reason again, mental control; sometimes felt that he was on the way to acquiring mental mastery.

But traces of injury to the mind still remained—sensitive places—and there were swift seconds of agony—of blind anger, of crafty, unbalanced watching to do harm. Yet for all that he knew he was convalescent—that alcohol was no longer a neces-

sity to him; that whatever he did had now become a choice for him; that he had the power and the authority and the will, and was capable, once more, of choosing between depravity and decency. But what had been taken out of his life seemed to leave a dreadful silence in his brain. And, at moments, this silence became dissonant with the clamour of unreason.

On one of his worst days when his crippled soul was loneliest the icy seas became terrific. Cruisers and destroyers of the escort remained invisible, and none of the convoyed transports were to be seen. The watery, lowering daylight faded: the unseen sun set: the brief day ended. And the wind went down with the sun. But through the thick darkness the turbulent wind appeared to grow luminous with tossing wraiths; and all the world seemed to dissolve into a nebulous, hell-driven thing, unreal, dreadful, unendurable!

"Mr. McKay!"

He had already got into his wool dressing-robe and felt shoes, and he sat now very still on the edge of his berth, listening stealthily with the cunning of distorted purpose.

Her tiny room was just across the corridor. She seemed to be eternally sleepless, always on the alert night and day, ready to interfere with him.

Finally he ventured to rise and move cautiously to his door, and he made not the slightest sound in opening it, but her door opened instantly, and she stood there confronting him, an ulster buttoned over her nightdress.

"What is the matter?" she said gently.

"Nothing."

"Are you having a bad night?"

"I'm all right. I wish you wouldn't constitute yourself my nurse, servant, mentor, guardian, keeper, and personal factotum!" Sudden rage left him inarticulate, and he shot an ugly look at her. "Can't you let me alone?" he snarled.

"You poor boy," she said under her breath.

"Don't talk like that! Damnation! I—I can't stand much more—I can't stand it, I tell you!"

"Yes, you can, and you will. And I don't mind what you say to me." His malignant expression altered.

"Do you know," he said, in a cool and evil voice, "that I may stop *saying* things and take to *doing* them?"

"Would you hurt me physically? Are you really as sick as that?"

"Not yet. . . . How do I know?" Suddenly he felt tired and leaned against the doorway, covering his dulling eyes with his right forearm. But his hand was now clenched convulsively.

"Could you lie down? I'll talk to you," she whispered. "I'll see you through."

"I can't—endure—this tension," he muttered. "For God's sake let me go!"

"Where?"

"You know."

"Yes. . . . But it won't do. We must carry on, you and I."

"If you—knew——"

"I do know! When these crises come try to fix your mind on what you have become."

"Yes. . . . A hell of a soldier. Do you really believe that my country needs a thing like me?" She stood looking at him in silence—knowing that he was in a torment of some terrible sort. His eyes were still covered by his arm. On his boyish brow the blonde-brown hair had become damp.

She went across and passed her arm through his. His hand rested, fell to his side, but he suffered her to guide him through the corridors toward a far bluish spark that seemed as distant as Venus, the star.

They walked very slowly for a while on deck, encountering now and then the shadowy forms of officers and crew. The personnel of the several hospital units in transit were long ago in bed below.

Once he said: "You know, Miss Erith, it is not *I* who behaves like a scoundrel to you."

"I know," she said with a dauntless smile.

"Because," he went on, searching painfully for thought as well as words, "I'm not really a brute—was not always a blackguard——"

"Do you suppose for one moment that I blame a man who has been irresponsible through no fault of his, and who has made the fight and has won back to sanity?"

"I—am not yet—well!"

"I understand."

They paused beside the port rail for a few moments.

"I suppose you know," he muttered, "that I have

thought—at times—of ending things—down there. . . . You seem to know most things. Did you suspect that?"

"Yes."

"Don't you ever sleep?"

"I wake easily."

"I know you do. I can't stir in bed but I hear you move, too. . . . I should think you'd hate and loathe me—for all I've done—for all I've cost you."

"Nurses don't loathe their patients," she said lightly.

"I should think they'd want to kill them."

"Oh, Mr. McKay! On the contrary they—they grow to like them—exceedingly."

"You dare not say that about yourself and me."

Miss Erith shrugged her pretty shoulders: "I don't have to say anything, do I?"

He made no reply. After a long silence she said casually: "The sea is calmer, I think. There's something resembling faint moonlight up among those flying clouds."

He lifted his tragic face and gazed up at the storm-wrack speeding overhead. And there through the hurrying vapours behind flying rags of cloud, a pallid lustre betrayed the smothered moon.

There was just enough light, now, to reveal the forward gun under its jacket, and the shadowy gun-crew around it where the ship's bow like a vast black plough ripped the sea asunder in two deep, foaming furrows.

"I wish I knew where we are at this moment," mused the girl. She counted the days on her finger-

tips: "We may be off Bordeaux. . . . It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

To him it had been a century of dread endured through half-awakened consciousness of the latest inferno within him.

"It's been very long," he said, sighing.

A few minutes later they caught a glimpse of a strangled moon overhead—a livid corpse of a moon, tarnished and battered almost out of recognition.

"Clearing weather," she said cheerfully, adding: "To-morrow we may be in the danger zone. . . . Did you ever see a submarine?"

"Yes. Did you?"

"There were some up the Hudson. I saw them last summer while motoring along Riverside Drive."

The spectral form of an officer appeared at her elbow, said something in a low voice, and walked aft.

She said: "Well, then, I think we'd better dress. . . . Do you feel better?"

He said that he did, but his sombre gaze into darkness belied him. So again she slipped her arm through his and he suffered himself to be led away along the path of shinning arrows under foot.

At his door she said cheerfully: "No more undressing for bed, you know. No more luxury of night-clothes. You heard the orders about lifebelts?"

"Yes," he replied listlessly.

"Very well. I'll be waiting for you."

She lingered a moment more watching him in his brooding revery where he stood leaning against the doorway. And after a while he raised his haunted eyes to hers.

"I can't keep on," he breathed.

"Yes you can!"

"No. . . . The world is slipping away—under foot. It's going on without me—in spite of me."

"It's you that are slipping, if anything is. Be fair to the world at least—even if you mean to betray it—and me."

"I don't want to betray anybody—anything." He had begun to tremble when he stood leaning against his door. "I—don't know—what to do."

"Stand by the world. Stand by me. And, through me, stand by your own self."

The young fellow's forehead was wet with the vague horror of something. He made an effort to speak, to straighten up; gave her a dreadful look of appeal which turned into a snarl.

He whispered between writhing lips: "Can't you let me alone? Can't I end it if I can't stand it—without your blocking me every time—every time I stir a finger——"

"McKay! Wait! Don't touch me!—don't do that!"

But he had her in a sudden grip now—was looking right and left for a place to hurl her out of the way.

"I've stood enough, by God!" he muttered between his teeth. "Now I'm through——"

"Please listen. You're out of your mind," she said breathlessly, not struggling to free herself, but striving to twist both her arms around one of his.

"You hurt me," she whimpered. "Don't be brutal to me!"

"I've got to get you out of my way." He tried to fling her across the corridor into her own cabin, but she had fastened herself to him.

"Don't!" she panted. "Don't do anything to yourself——"

"Let go of me! Unclasp your arms!"

But she clung the more desperately and wound her limbs around his, almost tripping him.

"I *won't* give you up!" she gasped.

"What do you care?" he retorted hoarsely, striving to tear himself loose. "I want to get some rest —somewhere!"

"You're hurting! You're breaking my arm! Kay! Kay! what are you doing to me?" she wailed.

Something—perhaps the sound of his own name falling from her lips for the first time—checked his mounting frenzy. She could feel every muscle in his body become rigidly inert.

"Kay!" she whispered, fastening herself to him convulsively. For a full minute she sustained his half-insane stare, then it altered, and her own eyes slowly closed, though her head remained upright on the rigid marble of her neck.

The crisis had been reached: the tide of frenzy was turning, had turned, was already ebbing. She felt it, was conscious that he also had become aware of it. Then his grasp slackened, grew lax, loosened, and almost spent. She ventured to unwind her limbs from his, to relax her stiffened fingers, unclasp her arms.

It was over. She could scarcely stand, felt

blindly for support, rested so, and slowly unclosed her eyes.

"I've had to fight very hard for you," she whispered. "But I think I've won."

He answered with difficulty.

"Yes—if you want the dog you fought for."

"It isn't what *I* want, Kay."

"All right, I guess I can face it through—after this. . . . But I don't know why you did it."

"I do."

"Do you? Don't you know I'm not a man, but a beast? And there are half a hundred million real men to replace me—to do what you and the country expect of real men."

"What may be expected of them I expect of you. Kay, I've made a good fight for you, haven't I?"

He turned his quenched eyes on her. "From gutter to hospital, from hospital to sanitarium, from sanitarium to ship," he said in a colourless voice. "Yes, it was—a—good—fight."

"What a Calvary!" she murmured, looking at him out of clear, sorrowful eyes. "And on your knees, poor boy!"

"You ought to know. You have made every station with me—on your tender bleeding knees of a girl!" He choked, turned his head swiftly; and she caught his hand. The break had come.

"Oh, Kay! Kay!" she said, quivering all over, "I have done my bit and you are cured! You know it, don't you? Look at me, turn your head." She laid her slim hand flat against his tense cheek but could not turn his face. But she did not care; the

palm of her hand was wet. The break *had* come. She drew a deep, uneven breath, let go his hand.

"Now," she said, "we can understand each other at last—our minds are rational; and whether in accord or conflict they are at least in contact; and mine isn't clashing with something disordered and foreign which it can't interpret, can't approach."

He said, not turning toward her: "You are kind to put it that way. . . . I think self-control has returned—will-power—all that. . . . I won't—betray you—Miss Erith."

"*You* never would, Mr. McKay. But I—I've been in terror of what has been masquerading as you."

"I know. . . . But whatever you think of such a —a man—I'll do my bit, now. I'll carry on—until the end."

"I will too! I promise you."

He turned his head at that and a mirthless laugh touched his wet eyes and drawn visage:

"As though you had to promise anybody that you'd stick! *You!* You beautiful, magnificent young thing—you superb kid——"

Her surprise and the swift blaze of colour in her face silenced him.

After a moment, the painful red still staining his face, he muttered something about dressing.

He watched her turn and enter her room; saw that she had closed her door—something she had not dared do heretofore; then he went into his own room and threw himself down on the bunk, shaking in every nerve.

For a long while, preoccupied with the obsession for self-destruction, he lay there face downward, exhausted, trying to fight off the swimming sense of horror that was creeping over him again. . . . . Little by little it mounted like a tide from hell. . . . He struggled to his feet with the unuttered cry of a dreamer tearing his throat. An odd sense of fear seized him and he dressed and adjusted his clumsy life-suit. For the ship was in the danger zone, now, and orders had been given, and dawn was not far off. Perhaps it was already day! he could not tell in his dim cabin.

And after he was completely accoutred for the hazard of the Hun-cursed seas he turned and looked down at his bunk with the odd idea that his body still lay there—that it was a thing apart from himself—something inert, unyielding, corpse-like, sprawling there in a stupor—something visible, tangible, taking actual proportion and shape there under his very eyes.

He turned his back with a shudder and went on deck. To his surprise the blue lights were extinguished, and corridor and saloon were all rosy with early sunlight.

Blue sky, blue sea, silver spindrift flying and clouds of silvery gulls—a glimmer of Heaven from the depths of the pit—a glimpse of life through a crack in the casket—and land close on the starboard bow! Sheer cliffs, with the bonny green grass atop all furrowed by the wind—and the yellow-flowered broom and the shimmering whinns blowing.

"Why, it's Scotland," he said aloud, "it's Glenark

Cliffs and the Head of Strathlone—my people's fine place in the Old World—where we took root—and —O my God! Yankee that I am, it looks like home!"

The cape of a white fleece cloak fluttered in his face, and he turned and saw Miss Erith at his elbow.

Yellow-haired, a slender, charming thing in her white wind-blown coat, she stood leaning on the spray-wet rail close to his shoulder.

And with him it was suddenly as though he had known her for years—as though he had always been aware of her beauty and her loveliness—as though his eyes had always framed her—his heart had always wished for her, and she had always been the sole and exquisite tenant of his mind.

"I had no idea that we were off Scotland," he said—"off Strathlone Head—and so close in. Why, I can see the cliff-flowers!"

She laid one hand lightly on his arm, listening; high and heavenly sweet above the rushing noises of the sea they heard the singing of shoreward sky-larks above the grey cliff of Glenark.

He began to tremble. "That nightmare through which I've struggled," he began, but she interrupted:

"It is quite ended, Kay. You are awake. It is day and the world's before you." At that he caught her slim hand in both of his:

"Eve! Eve! You've brought me through death's shadow! You gave me back my mind!"

She let her hand rest between his. At first he could not make out what her slightly moving lips uttered, and bending nearer he heard her murmur:

"Beside the still waters." The sea had become as calm as a pond.

And now the transport was losing headway, scarcely moving at all. Forward and aft the gun-crews, no longer alert, lounged lazily in the sunshine watching a boat being loaded and swung outward from the davits.

"Is somebody going ashore?" asked McKay.

"We are," said the girl.

"Just you and I, Eve?"

"Just you and I."

Then he saw their luggage piled in the lifeboat.

"This is wonderful," he said. "I have a house a few miles inland from Strathlone Head."

"Will you take me there, Kay?"

Such a sense of delight possessed him that he could not speak.

"That's where we must go to make our plans," she said. "I didn't tell you in those dark hours we have lived together, because our minds were so far apart—and I was fighting so hard to hold you."

"Have you forgiven me—you wonderful girl?" His voice shook so that he could scarcely control it. Miss Erith laughed.

"You adorable boy!" she said. "Stand still while I unlace your life-belt. You can't travel in this."

He felt her soft fingers at his throat and turned his face upward. All the blue air seemed glittering with the sun-tipped wings of gulls. The skylark's song, piercingly sweet, seemed to penetrate his soul. And, as his life-suit fell about him, so seemed to fall the heavy weight of dread like a shroud, dropping

at his feet. And he stepped clear—took his first free step toward her—as though between them there were no questions, no barriers, nothing but this living, magic light—which bathed them both.

There seemed to be no need of speech, either, only the sense of heavenly contact as though the girl were melting into him, dissolving in his arms.

"Kay!"

Her voice sounded as from an infinite distance. There came a smothered thudding like the soft sound of guns at sea; and then her voice again, and a greyness as if a swift cloud had passed across the sun.

"Kay!"

A sharp, cold wind began to blow through the strange and sudden darkness. He heard her voice calling his name—felt his numbed body shaken, lifted his head from his arms and sat upright on his bunk in the dim chill of his cabin.

Miss Erith stood beside his bed, wearing her life-suit.

"Kay! Are you awake?"

"Yes."

"Then put on your life-suit. Our destroyers are firing at something. Quick, please, I'll help you!"

Dazed, shaken, still mazed by the magic of his dream, not yet clear of its beauty and its passion, he stumbled to his feet in the obscurity. And he felt her chilled hand aiding him.

"Eve—I—thought——"

"What?"

"I thought your name—was Eve—" he stammered. "I've been—dreaming."

Then was a silence as he fumbled stupidly with his clothing and life-suit. The sounds of the guns, rapid, distinct, echoed through the unsteady obscurity.

She helped him as a nurse helps a convalescent, her swift, cold little fingers moving lightly and unerringly. And at last he was equipped, and his mind had cleared darkly of the golden vision of love and spring.

Icy seas, monstrous and menacing, went smashing past the sealed and blinded port; but there was no wind and the thudding of the guns came distinctly to their ears.

A shape in uniform loomed at the cabin door for an instant and a calm, unhurried voice summoned them.

Corridors were full of dark figures. The main saloon was thronged as they climbed the companionway. There appeared to be no panic, no haste, no confusion. Voices were moderately low, the tone casually conversational.

Miss Erith's arm remained linked in McKay's where they stood together amid the crowd.

"U-boats, I fancy," she said.

"Probably."

After a moment: "What were you dreaming about, Mr. McKay?" she asked lightly. In the dull bluish dusk of the saloon his boyish face grew hot.

"What was it you called me?" she insisted. "Was it Eve?"

At that his cheeks burnt crimson.

"What do you mean?" he muttered.

"Didn't you call me Eve?"

"I—when a man is dreaming—asleep——"

"My name is Evelyn, you know. Nobody ever called me Eve. . . . Yet—it's odd, isn't it, Mr. McKay? I've always wished that somebody would call me Eve. . . . But perhaps you were not dreaming of me?"

"I—was."

"Really. How interesting!" He remained silent.

"And did you call me Eve—in that dream? . . . That is curious, isn't it, after what I've just told you? . . . So I've had my wish—in a dream." She laughed a little. "In a dream—*your* dream," she repeated. "We must have been good friends in your dream—that you called me Eve."

But the faint thrill of the dream was in him again, and it troubled him and made him shy, and he found no word to utter—no defence to her low-voiced banter.

Then, not far away on the port quarter, a deck-gun spoke with a sharper explosion, and intense stillness reigned in the saloon.

"If there's any necessity," he whispered, "you recollect your boat, don't you?"

"Yes. . . . I don't want to go—without you." He said, in a pleasant firm voice which was new to her: "I know what you mean. But you are not to worry. I am absolutely well."

The girl turned toward him, the echoes of the guns filling her ears, and strove to read his face in the ghastly, dreary light.

"I'm really cured, Miss Erith," he said. "If there's any emergency I'll fight to live. Do you believe me?"

"If you tell me so."

"I tell you so."

The girl drew a deep, unsteady breath, and her arm tightened a trifle within his.

"I am—so glad," she said in a voice that sounded suddenly tired.

There came an ear-splitting detonation from the after-deck, silencing every murmur.

"Something is shelling us," whispered McKay. "When orders come, go instantly to your boat and your station."

"I don't want to go alone."

"The nurses of the unit to which you——"

The crash of a shell drowned his voice. Then came a deathly silence, then the sound of the deck-guns in action once more.

Miss Erith was leaning rather heavily on his arm. He bent it, drawing her closer.

"I don't want to leave you," she said again.

"I told you——"

"It isn't that. . . . Don't you understand that I have become—your friend?"

"Such a brute as I am?"

"I like you."

In the silence he could hear his heart drumming between the detonations of the deck-guns. He said: "It's because you are you. No other woman on earth but would have loathed me . . . beastly rotter that I was——"

"Oh-h, don't," she breathed. . . . "I don't know —we may be very close to death. . . . I want to live. I'd like to. But I don't really mind death. . . . But I can't bear to have things end for you just as you've begun to live again——"

Crash! Something was badly smashed on deck that time, for the brazen jar of falling wreckage seemed continuous.

Through the metallic echo she heard her voice:

"Kay! I'm afraid—a little."

"I think it's all right so far. Listen, there go our guns again. It's quite all right, Eve dear."

"I didn't know I was so cowardly. But of course I'll never show it when the time comes."

"Of course you won't. Don't worry. Shells make a lot of noise when they explode on deck. All that tinpan effect we heard was probably a ventilator collapsing—perhaps a smokestack."

After a silence punctured by the flat bang of the deck-guns:

"You *are* cured, aren't you, Kay?"

"Yes."

She repeated in a curiously exultant voice: "You *are* cured. All of a sudden—after that black crisis, too, you wake up, well!"

"You woke me."

"Of course, I did—with those guns frightening me!"

"You woke me, Eve," he repeated coolly, "and my dream had already cured me. I am perfectly well. We'll get out of this mess shortly, you and I.

And—and then——" He paused so long that she looked up at him in the bluish dusk:

"And what then?" she asked.

He did not answer. She said: "Tell me, Kay."

But as his lips unclosed to speak a terrific shock shook the saloon—a shock that seemed to come from the depths of the ship, tilt up the cabin floor, and send everybody reeling about.

Through the momentary confusion in the bluish obscurity the cool voice of an officer sounded unalarmed, giving orders. There was no panic. The hospital units formed and started for the deck. A young officer passing near exchanged a calm word with McKay, and passed on speaking pleasantly to the women who were now moving forward.

McKay said to Miss Erith: "It seems that we've been torpedoed. We'll go on deck together. You know your boat and station?"

"Yes."

"I'll see you safely there. You're not afraid any more, are you?"

"No."

He gave a short dry laugh. "What a rotten deal," he said. "My dream was—different. . . . There is your boat—*that* one! . . . I'll say good luck. I'm assigned to a station on the port side. . . . Good luck. . . . And thank you, Eve."

"Don't go——"

"Yes, I must. We'll find each other—ashore—or somewhere."

"Kay! The port boats can't be launched——"

"Take your place! you're next, Eve." . . . Her

hand, which had clung to his, he suddenly twisted up, and touched the convulsively tightening fingers with his lips.

"Good luck, dear," he said gaily. And watched her go and take her place. Then he lifted his cap, as she turned and looked for him, and sauntered off to where his boat and station should have been had not the U-boat shells annihilated boat and rail and deck.

"What a devil of a mess!" he said to a petty officer near him. A young doctor smoking a cigarette surveyed his own life-suit and the clumsy apparel of his neighbours with unfeigned curiosity!

"How long do these things keep one afloat?" he inquired.

"Long enough to freeze solid," replied an ambulance driver.

"Did we get the Hun?" asked McKay of the petty officer.

"Naw," he replied in disgust, "but the destroyers ought to nail him. Look out, sir—you'll go sliding down that slippery toboggan!"

"How long'll she float?" asked the young ambulance driver.

"This ship? *She's* all right," remarked the petty officer absently.

She went down, nose first. Those in the starboard boats saw her stand on end for full five minutes, screws spinning, before a muffled detonation blew the bowels out of her and sucked her down like a plunging arrow.

Destroyers and launches from some of the cruisers were busy amid the wreckage where here, on a spar, some stunned form clung like a limpet, and there, a-bob in the curling seas, a swimmer in his life-suit tossed under the wintry sky.

There were men on rafts, too, and several clinging to hatches; there was not much loss of life, considering.

Toward midday a sea-plane which had been releasing depth-bombs and hovering eagerly above the wide iridescent and spreading stain, sheered shoreward and shot along the coast.

There was a dead man afloat in a cave, rocking there rather peacefully in his life-suit—or at least they supposed him to be dead.

But on a chance they signalled the discovery to a distant trawler, then soared upward for a general *coup de l'œil,* turned there aloft like a seahawk for a while, sheering in widening spirals, and finally, high in the grey sky, set a steady course for parts unknown.

Meanwhile a boat from the trawler fished out McKay, wrapped him in red-hot blankets, pried open his blue lips, and tried to fill him full of boiling rum. Then he came to life. But those honest fishermen knew he had gone stark mad because he struck at the pannikin of steaming rum and cursed them vigorously for their kindness. And only a madman could so conduct himself toward a pannikin of steaming rum. They understood that perfectly. And, understanding it, they piled more hot blankets

upon the struggling form of Kay McKay and roped him to his bunk.

Toward evening, becoming not only coherent but frightfully emphatic, they released McKay.

"What's this damn place?" he shouted.

"Strathlone Firth," they said.

"That's my country!" he raged. "I want to go ashore!"

They were quite ready to be rid of the cracked Yankee, and told him so.

"And the boats? How about them?" he demanded.

"All in the Firth, sir."

"Any women lost?"

"None, sir."

At that, struggling into his clothes, he began to shed gold sovereigns from his ripped money-belt all over the cabin. Weatherbeaten fingers groped to restore the money to him. But it was quite evident that the young man was mad. He wouldn't take it. And in his crazy way he seemed very happy, telling them what fine lads they were and that not only Scotland but the world ought to be proud of them, and that he was about to begin to live the most wonderful life that any man had ever lived as soon as he got ashore.

"Because," he explained, as he swung off and dropped into the small boat alongside, "I've taken a look into hell and I've had a glimpse of heaven, but the earth has got them both stung to death, and I like it and I'm going to settle down on it and

live awhile. You don't get me, do you?" They did not.

"It doesn't matter. You're a fine lot of lads. Good luck!"

And so they were rid of their Yankee lunatic.

On the Firth Quay and along the docks all the inhabitants of Glenark and Strathlone were gathered to watch the boats come in with living, with dead, or merely the news of the seafight off the grey head of Strathlone.

At the foot of the slippery waterstairs, green with slime, McKay, grasping the worn rail, lifted his head and looked up into the faces of the waiting crowd. And saw the face of her he was looking for among them.

He went up slowly. She pushed through the throng, descended the steps, and placed one arm around him.

"Thanks, Eve," he said cheerfully. "Are you all right?"

"All right, Kay. Are you hurt?"

"No. . . . I know this place. There's an inn . . . if you'll give me your arm—it's just across the street."

They went very leisurely, her arm under his—and his face, suddenly colourless, half-resting against her shoulder.

CHAPTER V

ISLA WATER

EARLIER in the evening there had been a young moon on Isla Water. Under it spectres of the mist floated in the pale lustre; a painted moorhen steered through ghostly pools leaving fan-shaped wakes of crinkled silver behind her; heavy fish splashed, swirling again to drown the ephemera.

But there was no moonlight now; not a star; only fog on Isla Water, smothering ripples and long still reaches, bank and upland, wall and house.

The last light had gone out in the stable; the windows of Isla were darkened; there was a faint scent of heather in the night; a fainter taint of peat smoke. The world had grown very still by Isla Water.

Toward midnight a dog-otter, swimming leisurely by the Bridge of Isla, suddenly dived and sped away under water; and a stoat, prowling in the garden, also took fright and scurried through the wicket. Then in the dead of night the iron bell hanging inside the court began to clang. McKay heard it first in his restless sleep. Finally the clangour broke his sombre dream and he awoke and sat up in bed, listening.

Neither of the two servants answered the alarm.

He swung out of bed and into slippers and dressing-gown and picked up a service pistol. As he entered the stone corridor he heard Miss Erith's door creak on its ancient hinges.

"Did the bell wake you?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes. What is it?"

"I haven't any idea."

She opened her door a little wider. Her yellow hair covered her shoulders like a mantilla. "Who could it be at this hour?" she repeated uneasily.

McKay peered at the phosphorescent dial of his wrist-watch:

"I don't know," he repeated. "I can't imagine who would come here at this hour."

"Don't strike a light!" she whispered.

"No, I think I won't." He continued on down the stone stairs, and Miss Erith ran to the rail and looked over.

"Are you armed?" she called through the darkness.

"Yes."

He went on toward the rear of the silent house and through the servants' hall, then around by the kitchen garden, then felt his way along a hedge to a hutchlike lodge where a fixed iron bell hung quivering under the slow blows of the clapper.

"What the devil's the matter?" demanded McKay in a calm voice.

The bell still hummed with the melancholy vibrations, but the clapper now hung motionless. Through the brooding rumour of metallic sound came a voice out of the mist:

"The hours of life are numbered. Is it true?"

"It is," said McKay coolly; "and the hairs of our head are numbered too!"

"So teach us to number our days," rejoined the voice from the fog, "that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

"The days of our years are three-score years and ten," said McKay. "Have you a name?"

"A number."

"And what number will that be?"

"Sixty-seven. And yours?"

"You should know that, too."

"It's the reverse; seventy-six."

"It is that," said McKay. "Come in."

He made his way to the foggy gate, drew bolt and chain from the left wicket. A young man stepped through.

"Losh, mon," he remarked with a Yankee accent, "it's a fearful nicht to be abroad."

"Come on in," said McKay, re-locking the wicket. "This way; follow me."

They went by the kitchen garden and servants' hall, and so through to the staircase hall, where McKay struck a match and Sixty-seven instantly blew it out.

"Better not," he said. "There are vermin about."

McKay stood silent, probably surprised. Then he called softly in the darkness:

"Seventy-seven!"

"Je suis la!" came her voice from the stairs.

"It's all right," he said, "it's one of our men.

No use sittin' up if you're sleepy." He listened but did not hear Miss Erith stir.

"Better return to bed," he said again, and guided Sixty-seven into the room on the left.

For a few moments he prowled around; a glass tinkled against a decanter. When he returned to the shadow-shape seated motionless by the casement window he carried only one glass.

"Don't you?" inquired Sixty-seven. "And you a Scot!"

"I'm a Yankee; and I'm through."

"With the stuff?"

"Absolutely."

"Oh, very well. But a Yankee laird—*tiens c'est assez drole!*" He smacked his lips over the smoky draught, set the half-empty glass on the deep sill. Then he began breezily:

"Well, Seventy-six, what's all this I hear about your misfortunes?"

"What do you hear?" inquired McKay guilelessly.

The other man laughed.

"I hear that you and Seventy-seven have entered the Service; that you are detailed to Switzerland and for a certain object unknown to myself; that your transport was torpedoed a week ago off the Head of Strathlone, that you wired London from this house of yours called Isla, and that you and Seventy-seven went to London last week to replenish the wardrobe you had lost."

"Is that all you heard?"

"It is."

"Well, what more do you wish to hear?"

"I want to know whether anything has happened to worry you. And I'll tell you why. There was a Hun caught near Banff! Can you beat it? The beggar wore kilts!—and the McKay tartan—and, by jinks, if his gillie wasn't rigged in shepherd's plaid!—and him with his Yankee passport and his gillie with a bag of ready-made rods. Yellow trout, is it? Sea-trout, is it! Ho, me bucko, says I when I lamped what he did with his first trout o' the burn this side the park—by Godfrey! thinks I to myself, you're no white man at all!—you're Boche. And it was so, McKay."

"Seventy-six," corrected McKay gently.

"That's better. It should become a habit."

"Excuse me, Seventy-six; I'm Scotch-Irish way back. You're straight Scotch—somewhere back. We Yankees don't use rods and flies and net and gaff as these Scotch people use 'em. But we're white, Seventy-six, and we use 'em *right* in our own fashion." He moistened his throat, shoved aside the glass:

"But this kilted Boche! Oh, la-la! What he did with his rod and flies and his fish and himself! *and* his gillie! Sure *you're* not white at all, thinks I. And at that I go after them."

"You got them?"

"Certainly—at the inn—gobbling a trout, *blaue gesotten*—having gone into the kitchen to show a decent Scotch lassie how to concoct the Hunnish dish. I nailed them then and there—took the chance that the swine weren't right. And won out."

"Good! But what has it to do with me?" asked McKay.

"Well, I'll be telling you. I took the Boche to London and I've come all the way back to tell you this, Seventy-six; the Huns are on to you and what you're up to. That Boche laird called himself Stanley Brown, but his name is—or was—Schwartz. His gillie proved to be a Swede."

"Have they been executed?"

"You bet. Tower style! We got another chum of theirs, too, who set up a holler like he saw a pan of hogwash. We're holding him. And what we've learned is this: The Huns made a special set at your transport in order to get *you* and Seventy-seven!

"Now they know you are here and their orders are to get you before you reach France. The hog that hollered put us next. He's a Milwaukee Boche; name Zimmerman. He's so scared that he tells all he knows and a lot that he doesn't. That's the trouble with a Milwaukee Boche. Anyway, London sent me back to find you and warn you. Keep your eye skinned. And when you're ready for France wire Edinburgh. You know where. There'll be a car and an escort for you and Seventy-seven."

McKay laughed: "You know," he said, "there's no chance of trouble here. Glenark is too small a village——"

"Didn't I land a brace of Boches at Banff?"

"That's true. Well, anyway, I'll be off, I expect, in a day or so." He rose; "and now I'll show you a bed——"

"No; I've a dog-cart tied out yonder and a chaser lying at Glenark. By Godfrey, I'm not finished with these Boche-jocks yet!"

"You're going?"

"You bet. I've a date to keep with a suspicious character—on a trawler. Can you beat it? These vermin creep in everywhere. Yes, by Godfrey! They crawl aboard ship in sight of Strathlone Head! Here's hoping it may be a yard-arm jig he'll dance!"

He emptied his glass, refused more. McKay took him to the wicket and let him loose.

"Well, over the top, old scout!" said Sixty-seven cheerily, exchanging a quick handclasp with McKay. And so the fog took him.

A week later they found his dead horse and wrecked dog-cart five miles this side of Glenark Burn, lying in a gully entirely concealed by whinn and broom. It was the noise the flies made that attracted attention. As for the man himself, he floated casually into the Firth one sunny day with five bullets in him and his throat cut very horridly.

But, before that, other things happened on Isla Water—long before anybody missed No. 67. Besides, the horse and dog-cart had been hired for a week; and nobody was anxious except the captain of the trawler, held under mysterious orders to await the coming of a man who never came.

So McKay went back through the fog to his quaint, whitewashed inheritance—this legacy from a Scotch grandfather to a Yankee grandson—and

when he came into the dark waist of the house he called up very gently: "Are you awake, Miss Yellow-hair?"

"Yes. Is all well?"

"All's well," he said, mounting the stairs.

"Then—good night to you Kay of Isla!" she said.

"Don't you want to hear——"

"To-morrow, please."

"But——"

"As long as you say that all is well I refuse to lose any more sleep!"

"Are you sleepy, Yellow-hair?"

"I am."

"Aren't you going to sit up and chat for a few——"

"I am not!"

"Have you no curiosity?" he demanded, laughingly.

"Not a bit. You say everything is all right. Then it is all right—when Kay of Isla says so! Good night!"

What she had said seemed to thrill him with a novel and delicious sense of responsibility. He heard her door close; he stood there in the stone corridor a moment before entering his room, experiencing an odd, indefinite pleasure in the words this girl had uttered—words which seemed to reinstate him among his kind, words which no woman would utter except to a man in whom she believed.

And yet this girl knew him—knew what he had

been—had seen him in the depths—had looked upon the wreck of him.

Out of those depths she had dragged what remained of him—not for his own sake perhaps—not for his *beaux-yeux*—but to save him for the service which his country demanded of him.

She had fought for him—endured, struggled spiritually, mentally, bodily to wrench him out of the coma where drink had left him with a stunned brain and crippled will.

And now, believing in her work, trusting, confident, she had just said to him that what he told her was sufficient security for her. And on his word that all was well she had calmly composed herself for sleep as though all the dead chieftains of Isla stood on guard with naked claymores! Nothing in all his life had ever so thrilled him as this girl's confidence.

And, as he entered his room, he knew that within him the accursed thing that had been, lay dead forever.

He was standing in the walled garden switching a limber trout-rod when Miss Erith came upon him next morning,—a tall straight young man in his kilts, supple and elegant as the lancewood rod he was testing.

Conscious of a presence behind him he turned, came toward her in the sunlight, the sun crisping his short hair. And in his pleasant level eyes the girl saw what had happened—what she had wrought—that this young man had come into his own again—

into his right mind and his manhood—and that he had resumed his place among his fellow men and peers.

He greeted her seriously, almost formally; and the girl, excited and a little upset by the sudden realisation of his victory and hers, laughed when he called her "Miss Erith."

"You called me Yellow-hair last night," she said. "I called you Kay. Don't you want it so?"

"Yes," he said reddening, understanding that it was her final recognition of a man who had definitely "come back."

Miss Erith was very lovely as she stood there in the garden whither breakfast was fetched immediately and laid out on a sturdy green garden-table —porridge, coffee, scones, jam, and an egg.

Chipping the latter she let her golden-hazel eyes rest at moments upon the young fellow seated opposite. At other moments, sipping her coffee or buttering a scone, she glanced about her at the new grass starred with daisies, at the daffodils, the slim young fruit-trees,—and up at the old white façade of the ancient abode of the Lairds of Isla.

"Why the white flag up there, Kay?" she inquired, glancing aloft.

He laughed, but flushed a little. "Yankee that I am," he admitted, "I seem to be Scot enough to observe the prejudices and folk-ways of my forebears."

"Is it your clan flag?"

"Bratach Bhan Chlaun Aoidh," he said smilingly. "The White Banner of the McKays."

"Good! And what may that be—that bunch of weed you wear in your button-hole?" Again the young fellow laughed: *"Seasgan or Cuilc*—in Gaelic—just reed-grass, Miss Yellow-hair."

"Your clan badge?"

"I believe so."

"You're a good Yankee, Kay. You couldn't be a good Yankee if you treated Scotch custom with contempt. . . . This jam is delicious. And oh, such scones!"

"When we go to Edinburgh we'll tea on Princess Street," he remarked. "It's there you'll fall for the Scotch cakes, Yellow-hair."

"I've already fallen for everything Scotch," she remarked demurely.

"Ah, wait! This Scotland is no strange land to good Americans. It's a bonnie, sweet, clean bit of earth made by God out of the same batch he used for our own world of the West. Oh, Yellow-hair, I mind the first day I ever saw Scotland. 'Twas across Princess Street—across acres of Madonna lilies in that lovely foreland behind which the Rock lifted skyward with Edinburgh Castle atop made out of grey silver slag! It was a brave sight, Yellow-hair. I never loved America more than at that moment when, in my heart, I married her to Scotland."

"Kay, you're a poet!" she exclaimed.

"We all are here, Yellow-hair. There's naught else in Scotland," he said laughing.

The man was absolutely transformed, utterly different. She had never imagined that a "cure" meant

the revelation of this unsuspected personality—this alternation of pleasant gravity and boyish charm.

Something of what preoccupied her he perhaps suspected, for the colour came into his handsome lean features again and he picked up his rod, rising as she rose.

"Are there no instructions yet?" she inquired.

As he stood there threading the silk line through the guides he told her about the visit of No. 67.

"I fancy instructions will come before long," he remarked, casting a leaderless line out across the grass. After a moment he glanced rather gravely at her where she stood with hands linked behind her, watching the graceful loops which his line was making in the air.

"You're not worried, are you, Yellow-hair?"

"About the Boche?"

"I meant that."

"No, Kay, I'm not uneasy."

And when the girl had said it she knew that she had meant a little more; she had meant that she felt secure with this particular man beside her.

It was a strange sort of peace that was invading her—an odd courage quite unfamiliar—an effortless pluck that had suddenly become the most natural thing in the world to this girl, who, until then, had clutched her courage desperately in both hands, commended her soul to God, her body to her country's service.

Frightened, she had set out to do this service, knowing perfectly what sort of fate awaited her if she fell among the Boche.

Frightened but resolute she faced the consequences with this companion about whom she knew nothing; in whom she had divined a trace of that true metal which had been so dreadfully tarnished and transmuted.

And now, here in this ancient garden—here in the sun of earliest summer, she had beheld a transfiguration. And still under the spell of it, still thrilled by wonder, she had so utterly believed in it, so ardently accepted it, that she scarcely understood what this transfiguration had also wrought in her. She only felt that she was no longer captain of their fate; that he was now; and she resigned her invisible insignia of rank with an unconscious little sigh that left her pretty lips softly parted.

At that instant he chanced to look up at her. She was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in the world. And she had looked at him out of those golden eyes when he had been less than a mere brute beast. . . . That was very hard to know and remember. . . . But it was the price he had to pay—that this fresh, sweet, clean young thing had seen him as he once had been, and that he never could forget what she had looked upon.

"Kay!"

"Yes, Lady Yellow-hair."

"What are you going to do with that rod?"

"Whip Isla for a yellow trout for you."

"Isla?"

"Not our Loch, but the quick water yonder."

"You know," she said, "to a Yankee girl those moors appear rather—rather lonely."

"Forbidding?"

"No; beautiful in their way. But I am in awe of Glenark moors."

He smiled, lingering still to loop on a gossamer leader and a cast of tiny flies.

"Have you——" she began, and smiled nervously.

"A gun?" he inquired coolly. "Yes, I have two strapped up under both arms. But you must come too, Yellow-hair."

"You don't think it best to leave me alone even in your own house?"

"No, I don't think it best."

"I wanted to go with you anyway," she said, picking up a soft hat and pulling it over her golden head.

On the way across Isla bridge and out along the sheep-path they chatted unconcernedly. A faint aromatic odour made the girl aware of broom and whinn and heath.

As they sauntered on along the edge of Isla Water the lapwings rose into flight ahead. Once or twice the feathery whirr of brown grouse startled her. And once, on the edge of cultivated land, a partridge burst from the heather at her very feet—a "Frenchman" with his red legs and gay feathers brilliant in the sun.

Sun and shadow and white cloud, heath and moor and hedge and broad-tilled field alternated as they passed together along the edge of Isla Water and over the road to Isla—the enchanting river—interested in each other's conversation and in the loveliness of the sunny world about them.

High in the blue sky plover called *en passant;* larks too were on the wing, and throstles and charm-

ing feathered things that hid in hedgerows and permitted glimpses of piquant heads and twitching painted tails.

"It is adorable, this country!" Miss Erith confessed. "It steals into your very bones; doesn't it?"

"And the bones still remain Yankee bones," he rejoined. "There's the miracle, Yellow-hair."

"Entirely. You know what I think? The more we love the more loyal we become to our own. I'm really quite serious. Take yourself for example, Kay. You are most ornamental in your kilts and heather-spats, and you are a better Yankee for it. Aren't you?"

"Oh yes, a hopeless Yankee. But that drop of Scotch blood is singing tunes to-day, Yellow-hair."

"Let it sing—God bless it!"

He turned, his youthful face reflecting the slight emotion in her gay voice. Then with a grave smile he set his face straight in front of him and walked on beside her, the dark green pleats of the McKay tartan whipping his bared knees. Clan Morhguinn had no handsomer son; America no son more loyal.

A dragon-fly glittered before them for an instant. Far across the rolling country they caught the faint, silvery flash of Isla hurrying to the sea.

Evelyn Erith stood in the sunny breeze of Isla, her yellow hair dishevelled by the wind, her skirt's edge wet with the spray of waterfalls. The wild rose colour was in her cheeks and the tint of crimson roses on her lips and the glory of the Soleil d'or glimmered on her loosened hair. A confused sense

that the passing hour was the happiest in her life possessed her: she looked down at the brace of wet yellow trout on the bog-moss at her feet; she gazed out across the crinkled pool where the Yankee Laird of Isla waded, casting a big tinselled fly for the accidental but inevitable sea-trout always encountered in Isla during the season—always surprising and exciting the angler with emotion forever new.

Over his shoulder he was saying to her: "Sea-trout and grilse don't belong to Isla, but they come occasionally, Lady Yellow-hair."

"Like you and I, Kay—we don't belong here but we come."

"Where the McKay is, the Key of the World lies hidden in his sporran," he laughed back at her over his shoulder where the clan plaid fluttered above the cairngorm.

"Oh, the modesty of this young man! Wherever he takes off his cap he is at home!" she cried.

He only laughed, and she saw the slim line curl, glisten, loop and unroll in the long back cast, re-loop, and straighten out over Isla like a silver spider's floating strand. Then silver leaped to meet silver as the "Doctor" touched water; one keen scream of the reel cut the sunny silence; the rod bent like a bow, staggered in his hand, swept to the surface in a deeper bow, quivered under the tremendous rush of the great fish.

Miss Erith watched the battle from an angle not that of an angler. Her hazel eyes followed McKay where he manœuvred in midstream with rod and gaff—happily aware of the grace in every uncon-

scious movement of his handsome lean body—the steady, keen poise of head and shoulders, the deft and powerful play of his clean-cut, brown hands.

It came into her mind that he'd look like that on the firing-line some day when his Government was ready to release him from his obscure and terrible mission—the Government that was sending him where such men as he usually perish unobserved, unhonoured, repudiated even by those who send them to accomplish what only the most brave and unselfish dare undertake.

A little cloud cast a momentary shadow across Isla. The sea-trout died then, a quivering limber, metallic shape glittering on the ripples.

In the intense stillness from far across the noonday world she heard the bells of Banff—a far, sweet reiteration stealing inland on the wind. She had never been so happy in her life.

Swinging back across the moor together, he with slanting rod and weighted creel, she with her wind-blown yellow hair and a bunch of reed at her belt in his honour, both seemed to understand that they had had their hour, and that the hour was ending—almost ended now.

They had remained rather silent. Perhaps grave thoughts of what lay before them beyond the bright moor's edge—beyond the far blue horizon—preoccupied their minds. And each seemed to feel that their play-day was finished—seemed already to feel physically the approach of that increasing darkness shrouding the East—that hellish mist toward which they both were headed—the twilight of the Hun.

Nothing stained the sky above them; a snowy cloud or two drifted up there,—a flight of lapwings now and then—a lone curlew. The long, squat white-washed house with its walled garden reflected in Isla Water glimmered before them in the hollow of the rolling hills.

McKay was softly and thoughtfully whistling the "Lament for Donald"—the lament of *Clan Aoidh*—his clan.

"That's rather depressing, Kay—what you're whistling," said Evelyn Erith.

He glanced up from his abstraction, nodded, and strode on humming the "Over There" of that good bard George of Broadway.

After a moment the girl said: "There seem to be some people by Isla Water."

His quick glance appraised the distant group, their summer tourist automobile drawn up on the bank of Isla Water near the Bridge, the hampers on the grass.

"Trespassers," he said with a shrug. "But it's a pretty spot by Isla Bridge and we never drive them away."

She looked at them again as they crossed the very old bridge of stone. Down by the water's edge stood their machine. Beside it on the grass were picnicking three people—a very good-looking girl, a very common-looking stout young man in flashy outing clothes, and a thin man of forty, well-dressed and of better appearance.

The short, stout, flashy young man was eating sandwiches with one hand while with the other he held a fishing-rod out over the water.

McKay noticed this bit of impudence with a shrug. "That won't do," he murmured; and pausing at the parapet of the bridge he said pleasantly: "I'm sorry to disturb you, but fishing isn't permitted in Isla Water."

At that the flashy young man jumped up with unexpected nimbleness—a powerful frame on two very vulgar but powerful legs.

"Say, sport," he called out, "if this is your fishpond we're ready to pay what's right. What's the damage for a dozen fish?"

"Americans—awful ones," whispered Miss Erith.

McKay rested his folded arms on the parapet and regarded the advance of the flashy man up the grassy slope below.

"I don't rent fishing privileges," he said amiably.

"That's all right. Name your price. No millionaire guy I ever heard of ever had enough money," returned the flashy man jocosely.

McKay, amused, shook his head. "Sorry," he said, "but I couldn't permit you to fish."

"Aw, come on, old scout! We heard you was American same as us. That's my sister down there and her feller. My name's Jim Macniff—some Scotch somewhere. That there feller is Harry Skelton. Horses is our business—Spitalfields Mews—here's my card—" pulling it out—"I'll come up on the bridge——"

"Never mind. What are you in Scotland for anyway?" inquired McKay.

"The Angus Dhu stables at Inverness—auction

next Wednesday. Horses is our line, so we made it a holiday——"

"A holiday in the Banff country?"

"Sure, I ain't never seen it before. Is that your house?"

McKay nodded and turned away, weary of the man and his vulgarity. "Very well, picnic and fish if you like," he said; and fell into step beside Miss Erith.

They entered the house through the door in the garden. Later, when Miss Erith came back from her toilet, but still wearing her outing skirt, McKay turned from the long window where he had been standing and watching the picnickers across Isla Bridge. The flashy man had a banjo now and was strumming it and leering at the girl.

"What people to encounter in this corner of Paradise," she said laughingly. And, as he did not smile: "You don't suppose there's anything queer about them, do you, Kay?" At that he smiled: "Oh, no, nothing of that sort, Yellow-hair. Only—it's rather odd. But bagmen and their kind do come into the northland—why, Heaven knows—but one sees them playing about."

"Of course those people are merely very ordinary Americans—nothing worse," she said, seating herself at the table.

"What could be worse?" he returned lightly.

"Boche."

They were seated sideways to the window and opposite each other, commanding a clear view of Isla Water and the shore where the picnickers sprawled

apparently enjoying the semi-comatose pleasure of repletion.

"That other man—the thin one—has not exactly a prepossessing countenance," she remarked.

"They can't travel without papers," he said.

For a little while luncheon progressed in silence. Presently Miss Erith reverted to the picnickers: "The young woman has a foreign face. Have you noticed?"

"She's rather dark. Rather handsome, too. And she appears rather nice."

"Women of that class always appear superior to men of the same class," observed Miss Erith. "I suppose really they are not superior to the male of the species."

"I've always thought they were," he said.

"Men might think so."

He smiled: "Quite right, Yellow-hair; woman only is competent to size up woman. The trouble is that no man really believes this."

"Don't you?"

"I don't know. Tell me, what shall we do after luncheon?"

"Oh, the moors—please, Kay!"

"What!" he exclaimed laughingly; "you're already a victim to Glenark moors!"

"Kay, I adore them! . . . Are you tired? . . . Our time is short—our day of sunshine. I want to drink in all of it I can . . . before we——"

"Certainly. Shall we walk to Strathnaver, Lady Yellow-hair?"

"If it please my lord."

"Now?"

"In the cool of the afternoon. Don't you want to be lazy with me in your quaint old garden for an hour or two?"

"I'll send out two steamer-chairs, Yellow-hair."

When they lay there in the shadow of a lawn umbrella, chair beside chair, the view across Isla Water was unpolluted by the picnickers, their hamper, and their car.

"Stole away, the beggars," drawled McKay lighting a cigarette. "Where the devil they got a permit for petrol is beyond me."

The girl lay with deep golden eyes dreaming under her long dark lashes. Sunlight crinkled Isla Water; a merle came and sang to her in a pear-tree until, in its bubbling melody, she seemed to hear the liquid laughter of Isla rippling to the sea.

"Kay?"

"Yes, Yellow-hair." Their voices were vague and dreamy.

"Tell me something."

"I'll tell you something. When a McKay of Isla is near his end he is always warned."

"How?"

"A cold hand touches his hand in the dark."

"Kay!"

"It's so. It's called 'the Cold Hand of Isla.' We are all doomed to feel it."

"Absurd!"

"Not at all. That's a pretty story; isn't it? Now what more shall I tell you?"

"Anything you like, Kay. I'm in paradise—or

would be if only somebody would tell me stories till I fall asleep."

"Stories about what?"

"About *you,* Kay."

"I'll not talk about myself."

"Please!"

But he shook his head without smiling: "You know all there is," he said—"and much that is—unspeakable."

"Kay!"

"What?"

"Never, never speak that way again!"

He remained silent.

"Because," she continued in her low, pretty voice, "it is not true. I know about you only what I somehow seemed to divine the very moment I first laid eyes on you. Something within me seemed to say to me, 'This is a boy who also is a real man!' . . . And it was true, Kay."

"You thought that when you knelt in the snow and looked down at that beastly drunken——"

"Yes! Don't use such words! You looked like a big schoolboy, asleep—that is what you resembled. But I knew you to be a real man."

"You are merciful, but I know what you went through," he said morosely.

She paid no attention: "I liked you instantly. I thought to myself, 'Now when he wakes he'll be what he looks like.' And you are!"

He stirred in his chair, sideways, and glanced at her.

"You know what I think about you, don't you?"

"No." She shouldn't have let their words drift thus far and she knew it. Also at this point she should have diverted the conversation. But she remained silent, aware of an indefinite pleasure in the vague excitement which had quickened her pulse a little.

"Well, I shan't tell you," he said quietly.

"Why not?" And at that her heart added a beat or two.

"Because, even if I were different, you wouldn't wish me to."

"Why?"

"Because you and I are doomed to a rather intimate comradeship—a companionship far beyond conventions, Yellow-hair. That is what is ahead of us. And you will have enough to weary you without having another item to add to it."

"What item?" At that she became very silent and badly scared. What demon was prompting her to such provocation? Her own effrontery amazed and frightened her, but her words seemed to speak themselves independently of her own volition.

"Yellow-hair," he said, "I think you have guessed all I might have dared say to you were I not on eternal probation."

"Probation?"

"Before a bitterly strict judge."

"Who?"

"Myself, Yellow-hair."

"Oh, Kay! You *are* a boy—nothing more than a boy——"

"Are you in love with me?"

"No," she said, astonished. "I don't think so. What an amazing thing to say to a girl!"

"I thought I'd scare you," he remarked grimly.

"You didn't. I—I was scarcely prepared—such a nonsensical thing to say! Why—why I might as well ask you if you are in—in——"

"In love with you? You wish to know, Yellow-hair?"

"No, I don't," she replied hastily. "This is—stupid. I don't understand how we came to discuss such—such——" But she did know and she bit her lip and gazed across Isla Water in silent exasperation.

What mischief was this that hid in the Scottish sunshine, whispering in every heather-scented breeze—laughing at her from every little wave on Isla Water?—counselling her to this new and delicate audacity, imbuing her with a secret gaiety of heart, and her very soul fluttering with a delicious laughter—an odd, perverse, illogical laughter, alternately tremulous and triumphant!

Was she in love, then, with this man? She remembered his unconscious head on her knees in the limousine, and the snow clinging to his bright hair——

She remembered the telephone, and the call to the hospital—and the message. . . . And the white night and bitter dawn. . . . Love? No, not as she supposed it to be; merely the solicitude and friendship of a woman who once found something hurt by the war and who fought to protect what was hers

by right of discovery. That was not love. . . . Perhaps there may have been a touch of the maternal passion about her feeling for this man. . . . Nothing else—nothing more than that, and the eternal indefinable charity for all boys which is inherent in all womanhood—the consciousness of the enchantment that a boy has for all women. . . . Nothing more. . . . Except that—perhaps she had wondered whether he liked her—as much as she liked him. . . . Or if, possibly, in his regard for her there were some slight depths between shallows—a gratitude that is a trifle warmer than the conventional virtue——

When at length she ventured to turn her head and look at him he seemed to be asleep, lying there in the transformed shadow of the lawn umbrella.

Something about the motionless relaxation of this man annoyed her. "Kay?"

He turned his head squarely toward her, and to her exasperation she blushed.

"Did I wake you? I'm sorry," she said coldly.

"You didn't. I was awake."

"Oh! I meant to say that I think I'll stroll out. Don't come if you feel lazy."

He swung himself up to a sitting posture.

"I'm quite ready," he said. . . . "You'll always find me ready, Yellow-hair—always waiting."

"Waiting? For what?"

"For your commands."

"You very nice boy!" she said gaily, springing to her feet. Then, the subtle demon of the sunlight prompting her: "You know, Kay, you don't ever

have to wait. Because I'm always ready to listen to any pro—any suggestions—from you."

The man looked into the girl's eyes:

"You would care to hear what I might have to tell you?"

"I always care to hear what you say. Whatever you say interests me."

"Would it interest you to know I am—in love?"

"Yes. . . . With wh—whom are——" But her breath failed her.

"With you. . . . You knew it, Yellow-hair. . . . Does it interest you to know it?"

"Yes." But the exhilaration of the moment was interfering with her breath again and she only stood there with the flushed and audacious little smile stamped on her lips forcing her eyes to meet his curious, troubled, intent gaze.

"You did know it?" he repeated.

"No."

"You suspected it."

"I wanted to know what you—thought about me, Kay."

"You know now."

"Yes . . . but it doesn't seem real. . . . And I haven't anything to say to you. I'm sorry——"

"I understand, Yellow-hair."

"——Except—thank you. And—and I am interested. . . . You're such a boy. . . . I like you so much, Kay. . . . And I *am* interested in what you said to me."

"That means a lot for you to say, doesn't it?"

"I don't know. . . . It's partly what we have

been through together, I suppose; partly this lovely country, and the sun. Something is enchanting me. . . . And you are very nice to look at, Kay." His smile was grave, a little detached and weary.

"I did not suppose you could ever really care for such a man as I am," he remarked without the slightest bitterness or appeal in his voice. "But I'm glad you let me tell you how it is with me. . . . It always was that way, Yellow-hair, from the first moment you came into the hospital. I fell in love then."

"Oh, you couldn't have——"

"Nevertheless, and after all I said and did to the contrary. . . . I don't think any woman remains entirely displeased when a man tells her he is in love with her. If he does love her he ought to tell her, I think. It always means that much tribute to her power. . . . And none is indifferent to power, Yellow-hair."

"No. . . . I am not indifferent. I like what you said to me. It seems unreal, though—but enchanting—part of this day's enchantment. . . . Shall we start, Kay?"

"Certainly."

They went out together through the garden door into the open moor, swinging along in rhythmic stride, side by side, smiling faintly as dreamers smile when something imperceptible to the waking world invades their vision.

Again the brown grouse whirred from the whinns; again the subtle fragrance of the moor sweetened her throat with its clean aroma; again the haunting complaint of the lapwings came across acres of bog

and furze; and, high in the afternoon sky, an invisible curlew sadly and monotonously repeated its name through the vast blue vault of space.

On the edge of evening with all the west ablaze they came out once more on Isla Water and looked across the glimmering flood at the old house in the hollow, every distant window-pane a-glitter.

Like that immemorial and dragon-guarded jewel of the East the sun, cradled in flaky gold, hung a hand's breadth above the horizon, and all the world had turned to a hazy plum-bloom tint threaded with pale fire.

On Isla Water the yellow trout had not yet begun to jump; evening still lingered beyond the world's curved ruin; but the wild duck were coming in from the sea in twos and threes and sheering down into distant reaches of Isla Water.

Then, into the divine stillness of the universe came the unspeakable twang of a banjo; and a fat voice, slightly hoarse:

"Rocks on the mountain,
Fishes in the sea,
A red-headed girl
Raised hell with me.
She come from Chicago, R. F. D.
An' she ain't done a thing to a guy like me!"

The business was so grotesquely outrageous, so utterly and disgustingly hopeless in its surprise and untimelines, that McKay's sharp laugh rang out under the sky.

There they were, the same trespassers of the morning, squatted on the heather at the base of Isla Craig—a vast heap of rocks—their machine drawn up in the tall green brakes beside the road.

The flashy, fat man, Macniff, had the banjo. The girl sat between him and the thin man, Skelton.

"Ah, there, old scout!" called out Macniff, flourishing one hand toward McKay. "Lovely evening, ain't it? Won't you and the wife join us?"

There was absolutely nothing to reply to such an invitation. Miss Erith continued to gaze out steadily across Isla Water; McKay, deeply sensitive to the ludicrous, smiled under the grotesque provocation, his eyes mischievously fixed on Miss Erith. After a long while: "They've spoiled it," she said lightly. "Shall we go on, Kay? I can't endure that banjo."

They walked on, McKay grinning. The picnickers were getting up from the crushed heather; Macniff with his banjo came toward them on his incredibly thick legs, blocking their path.

"Say, sport," he began, "won't you and the lady join us?" But McKay cut him short:

"Do you know you are impudent?" he said very quietly. "Step out of the way there."

"The hell you say!" and McKay's patience ended at the same instant. And something happened very quickly, for the man only staggered under the smashing blow and the other man's arm flew up and his pistol blazed in the gathering dusk, shattering the cairngorm on McKay's shoulder. The young woman fired from where she sat on the grass and the soft hat was jerked from Miss Erith's head. At the

same moment McKay clutched her arm and jerked her violently behind a jutting elbow of Isla Rock. When she recovered her balance she saw he held two pistols.

"Boche?" she gasped incredulously.

"Yes. Keep your head down. Crouch among the ferns behind me!"

There was a ruddy streak of fire from the pistol in his right hand; shots answered, the bullets smacking the rock or whining above it.

"Yellow-hair?"

"Yes, Kay."

"You are not scared, are you?"

"Yes; but I'm all right."

He said with quiet bitterness: "It's too late to say what a fool I am. Their camouflage took me in; that's all——"

He fired again; a rattling volley came storming among the rocks.

"We're all right here," he said tersely. But in his heart he was terrified, for he had only the cartridges in his clips.

Presently he motioned her to bend over very low. Then, taking her hand, he guided her along an ascending gulley, knee-deep in fern and brake and brier, to a sort of little rocky pulpit.

The lake lay behind them, lapping the pulpit's base. There was a man in a boat out there. McKay fired at him and he plied both oars and fled out of range.

"Lie down," he whispered to Miss Erith. The girl mutely obeyed.

Now, crouched up there in the deepening dusk, his pistol extended, resting on the rock in front of him, his keen eyes searched restlessly; his ears were strained for the minutest stirring on the moor in front of him; and his embittered mind was at work alternately cursing his own stupidity and searching for some chance for this young girl whom his own incredible carelessness had probably done to death.

Presently, between him and Isla Water, a shadow moved. He fired; and around them the darkness spat flame from a dozen different angles.

"Damnation!" he whispered to himself, realising now what the sunlit moors had hidden—a dozen men all bent on murder.

Once a voice hailed him from the thick darkness promising immunity if he surrendered. He hesitated. Who but he should know the Boche? Still he answered back: "If you let this woman go you can do what you like to me!" And knew while he was saying it that it was useless—that there was no truth, no honour in the Boche, only infamy and murder. A hoarse voice promised what he asked; but Miss Erith caught McKay's arm.

"No!"

"If I dared believe them——"

"No, Kay!"

He shrugged: "I'd be very glad to pay the price—only they can't be trusted. They can't be trusted, Yellow-hair."

Somebody shouted from the impenetrable shadows:

"Come out of that now, McKay! If you don't we'll go in and cut her throat before we do for you!"

He remained silent, quite motionless, watching the darkness.

Suddenly his pistol flashed redly, rapidly; a heavy, soft bulk went tumbling down the rocks; another reeled there, silhouetted against Isla Water, then lurched forward, striking the earth with his face. And now from every angle slanting lines of blood-red fire streaked the night; Isla Craig rang and echoed with pelting lead.

"Next!" called out McKay with his ugly careless laugh. "Two down. No use to set 'em up again! Let dead wood lie. It's the law!"

"Can they hear the shooting at the house?" whispered Miss Erith.

"Too far. A shot on the moors carries only a little way."

"Could they see the pistol flashes, Kay?"

"They'd take them for fireflies or witch lights dancing on the bogs."

After a long and immobile silence he dropped to his knees, remained so listening, then crept across the Pulpit's ferny floor. Of a sudden he sprang up and fired full into a man's face; and struck the distorted visage with doubled fist, hurling it below, crashing down through the bracken.

After a stunned interval Miss Erith saw him wiping that hand on the herbage.

"Kay?"

"Yes, Yellow-hair."

"Can you see your wrist-watch?"

"Yes. It's after midnight."

The girl prayed silently for dawn. The man,

grim, alert, awaited events, clutching his partly emptied pistols. He had not yet told her that they were partly empty. He did not know whether to tell her. After a while he made up his mind.

"Yellow-hair?"

"Yes, dear Kay."

His lips went dry; he found difficulty in speaking: "I've—I've undone you. I've bitten the hand that saved me, your slim white hand, I'm afraid. I'm afraid I've destroyed you, Yellow-hair."

"How, Kay?"

"My pistols are half empty. . . . Unless dawn comes quick——"

Again one of his pistols flashed its crimson streak across the blackness and a man began scrambling and thrashing and screaming down there in the whinns. For a little while Miss Erith crouched beside McKay in silence. Then he felt her light touch on his arm:

"I've been thinking."

"Aye. So have I."

"Is there a chance to drop into the lake?"

He had not thought so. He had figured it out in every possible way. But there seemed little chance to swim that icy water—none at all—with that man in the boat yonder, and detection always imminent if they left the Pulpit. McKay shook his head slightly:

"He'd row us down and gralloch us like swimming deer."

"But if one goes alone?"

"Oh, Yellow-hair! Yellow-hair! If you only could!"

"I can."

"Swim it?"

"Yes."

"It's cold water. Few can swim Isla Water. It's a long swim from Isla Craig to the house."

"I can do it, I think."

After a terrible silence he said: "Yes, best try it, Yellow-hair. . . . I had meant to keep the last cartridge for you . . ."

"Dear Kay," she breathed close to his cheek.

Presently he was obliged to fire again, but remained uncertain as to his luck in the raging storm of lead that followed.

"I guess you better go, Yellow-hair," he whispered. "My guns are about all in."

"Try to hold them off. I'll come back. Of course you understand I'm not going for myself, Kay, I'm going for ammunition."

"What!"

"What did you suppose?" she asked curtly.

At that he blazed up: "If you can win through Isla Water you stay on the other side and telephone Glenark! Do you hear? I'm all right. It's—it's none of your business how I end this——"

"Kay?"

"What?"

"Turn your back. I'm undressing."

He heard her stripping, kneeling in the ferns behind him,—heard the rip of delicate fabric and the rustle of silk-lined garments falling.

Presently she said: "Can I be noticed if I slip down through the bushes to the water?"

"O God," he whispered, "be careful, Yellow-hair. . . . No, the man in the boat is keeping his distance. He'll never see you. Don't splash when you take the water. Swim like an otter, under, until you're well out. . . . You're young and sturdy, slim as you are. You'll get through if the chill of Isla doesn't paralyse you. But you've got to do it, Yellow-hair; you've *got* to do it."

"Yes. Hold them off, Kay. I'll be back. Hold them off, dear Kay. Will you?"

"I'll try, Yellow-hair. . . . Good luck! Don't try to come back!"

"Good luck," she whispered close to his ear; and, for a second he felt her slim young hands on his shoulders—lightly—the very ghost of contact. That was all. He waited a hundred years. Then another. Then, his weapons levelled, listening, he cast a quick glance backward. At the foot of the Pulpit a dark ripple lapped the rock. Nothing there now; nothing in Isla Water save far in the stars' lustre the shadowy boat lying motionless.

Toward dawn they tried to rush the Pulpit. He used a heavy fragment of rock on the first man up, and as his quarry went smashing earthward, a fierce whine burst from the others: "Shot out! All together now!" But his pistol spoke again and they recoiled, growling, disheartened, cursing the false hope that had re-nerved them.

It was his last shot, however. He had a heavy clasp-knife such as salmon-anglers carry. He laid his empty pistols on the rocky ledge. Very patiently

he felt for frost-loosened masses of rock, detached them one by one and noiselessly piled them along the ledge.

"It's odd," he thought to himself: "I'm going to be killed and I don't care. If Isla got *her,* then I'll see her very soon now, God willing. But if she wins out—why it is going to be longer waiting. . . . And I've put my mark on the Boche—not as often as I wished—but I've marked some of them for what they've done to me—and to the world——"

A sound caught his ear. He waited, listening. Had it been a fighting chance in Isla Water he'd have taken it. But the man in the boat!—and to have one's throat cut—like a deer! No! He'd kill all he could first; he'd die fighting, not fleeing.

He looked at his wrist-watch. Miss Erith had been gone two hours. That meant that her slender body lay deep, deep in icy Isla.

Now, listening intently, he heard the bracken stirring and something scraping the gorse below. They were coming; they were among the rocks! He straightened up and hurled a great slab of rock down through darkness; heard them scrambling upward still; seized slab after slab and smashed them downward at the flashes as the red flare of their pistols lit up his figure against the sky.

Then, as he hurled the last slab and clutched his short, broad knife, a gasping breath fell on his cheek and a wet and icy little hand thrust a box of clips into his. And there and then The McKay almost died, for it was as if the "Cold Hand of Isla" had touched him. And he stared ahead to see his own wraith.

"Quick!" she panted. "We can hold them, Kay!"

"Yellow-hair! By God! You bet we can!" he cried with a terrible burst of laughter; and ripped the clips from the box and snapped them in with lightning speed.

Then his pistols vomited vermilion, clearing the rock of vermin; and when two fresh clips were snapped in, the man stood on the Pulpit's edge, mad for blood, his fierce young eyes searching the blackness about him.

"You dirty rats!" he cried, "come back! Are you leaving your dead in the bracken then?"

There were distant sounds on the moor; nothing stirred nearer.

"Are you coming back?" he shouted, "or must I go after you?"

Suddenly in the night their motor roared. At the same moment, far across the lake, he saw the headlights of other motors glide over Isla Bridge like low-flying stars.

"Yellow-hair!"

There was no sound behind him. He turned.

The fainting girl lay amid her drenched yellow hair in the ferns, partly covered by the clothing which she had drawn over her with her last conscious effort.

It is a long way across Isla Water. And twice across is longer. And "The Cold Hand of Isla" summons the chief of Clan Morhguinn when his time has come to look upon his own wraith face to face. But The Cold Hand of Isla had touched this girl in vain—*Moladh Mairi!!*

"Yellow-hair! Yellow-hair!" he whispered. The roar of rushing motors from Glenark filled his ears. He picked up one of her little hands and chafed it. Then she opened her golden eyes, looked up at him, and a flood of rose dyed her body from brow to ankle.

"It—it is a long way across Isla Water," she stammered. "I'm very tired—Kay!"

"You below there!" shouted McKay. "Are there constables among you?"

"Aye, sir!" came the loud response amid the roar of running engines.

"Then there'll be whiskey and blankets, I'm thinkin'!" cried McKay.

"Aye, blankets for the dead if there be any!"

"Kick 'em into the whinns and bring what ye bring for the living!" said McKay in a loud, joyous voice. "And if you've petrol and speed take the Banff road and be on your way, for the Boche are crawling to cover, and it's fine running the night! Get on there, ye Glenark beagles! And leave a car behind for me and mine!"

A constable, shining his lantern, came clumping up the Pulpit. McKay snatched the heavy blankets and with one mighty movement swept the girl into them.

Half-conscious she coughed and gasped at the whiskey, then lay very still as McKay lifted her in his arms and strode out under the paling stars of Isla.

CHAPTER VI

MOUNT TERRIBLE

TOWARD the last of May a handsome young man wearing a smile and the uniform of an American Intelligence Officer arrived at Delle, a French village on the Franco-Swiss frontier.

His credentials being satisfactory he was directed by the Major of Alpinists commanding the place to a small stucco house on the main street.

Here he inquired for a gentleman named Number Seventy. The gentleman's other name was John Recklow, and he received the Intelligence Officer, locked the door, and seated himself behind his desk with his back to the sunlit window, and one drawer of his desk partly open.

Credentials being requested, and the request complied with accompanied by a dazzling smile, there ensued a silent interval of some length during which the young man wearing the uniform of an American Intelligence Officer was not at all certain whether Recklow was examining him or the papers of identification.

After a while Recklow nodded: "You came through from Toul, Captain?"

"From Toul, sir," with the quick smile revealing dazzling teeth.

"Matters progress?"

"It is quiet there."

"So I understand," nodded Recklow. "There's blood on your uniform."

"A scratch—a spill from my motor-cycle."

Recklow eyed the cut on the officer's handsome face. One of the young officer's hands was bandaged, too.

"You've been in action, Captain."

"No, sir."

"You wear German shoes."

The officer's brilliant smile wrinkled his good-looking features: "There was some little loot: I'm wearing my share."

Recklow nodded and let his cold eyes rest on the identification papers.

Then, slowly, and without a word, he passed them back over the desk.

The Intelligence Officer stuffed them carelessly into his side-pocket.

"I thought I'd come over instead of wiring or 'phoning. Our people have not come through yet, have they?"

"Which people, sir?"

"McKay and Miss Erith."

"No, not yet."

The officer mused for a moment, then: "They wired me from Paris yesterday, so they're all right so far. You'll see to it personally that they get through the Swiss wire, won't you?"

"Through or over, sir."

The Intelligence Officer displayed his mirthful teeth:

"Thanks. I'm also sending three of my own people through the wire. They'll have their papers in order—here are the duplicates I issued; they'll have their photographs on the originals."

He fished out a batch of papers and laid them on Recklow's desk.

"Who are these people?" demanded Recklow.

"Mine, sir."

"Oh."

There fell a silence; but Recklow did not examine the papers; he merely pocketed them.

"I think that's all," said the Intelligence Officer. "You know my name—Captain Herts. In case you wish to communicate just wire my department at Toul. They'll forward anything if I'm away on duty."

He saluted: Recklow followed him to the door, saw him mount his motor-cycle—a battered American machine—stood there watching until he was out of sight.

Hour after hour that afternoon Recklow sat in his quiet little house in Delle poring over the duplicate papers.

About five o'clock he called up Toul by telephone and got the proper department.

"Yes," came the answer, "Captain Herts went to you this morning on a confidential matter. . . . No, we don't know when he will return to Toul."

Recklow hung up, walked slowly out into his little garden and, seating himself on a green bench, took out the three packets of duplicate papers left him by

Captain Herts. Then he produced a jeweller's glass and screwed it into his right eye.

Several days later three people—two men and a young woman—arrived at Delle, were conveyed under military escort to the little house of Mr. Recklow, remained closeted with him until verification of their credentials in duplicate had been accomplished, then they took their departure and, that evening, they put up at the Inn.

But by the next morning they had disappeared, presumably over the Swiss wire—that being their destination as revealed in their papers. But the English touring-car which brought them still remained in the Inn garage. Recklow spent hours examining it.

Also the arrival and the departure of these three people was telephoned to Toul by Recklow, but Captain Herts still remained absent from Toul on duty and his department knew nothing about the details of the highly specialised and confidential business of Captain Herts.

So John Recklow went back to his garden and waited, and smoked a short, dirty clay pipe, and played with his family of cats.

Once or twice he went down at night to the French wire. All the sentries were friends of his.

"Anybody been through?" he inquired.

The answer was always the same: Nobody had been through as far as the patrol knew.

"Where the hell," muttered Recklow, "did those three guys go?"

A nightingale sang as he sauntered homeward. Possibly, being a French nightingale, she was trying to tell him that there were three people lying very still in the thicket near her.

But men are stupid and nightingales are too busy to bother about trifles when there is courting to be done and nests to be planned and all the anticipated excitement of the coming new moon to preoccupy a love-distracted bird.

On a warm, sunny day early in June, toward three o'clock in the afternoon, a *peloton* of French cavalry *en vidette* from Delle stopped a rather rickety touring-car several kilometres west of the Swiss frontier and examined the sheaf of papers offered for their inspection by the young man who drove the car.

A yellow-haired girl seated beside him leaned back in her place indifferently to relax her limbs.

From the time she and the young man had left Glenark in Scotland their progress had been a series of similar interruptions. Everywhere on every road soldiers, constables, military policemen, and gentlemen in mufti had displayed, with varying degrees of civility, a persistent curiosity to inspect such papers as they carried.

On the Channel transport it was the same; the same from Dieppe to Paris; from Paris to Belfort; and now, here within a pebble's toss of the Swiss frontier, military curiosity concerning their papers apparently remained unquenched.

The *sous-officier* of dragoon-lancers sat his splendid horse and gravely inspected the papers, one by

one. Behind him a handful of troopers lolled in their saddles, their lances advanced, their horses swishing their tails at the murderous, green-eyed *bremsers* which, like other bloodthirsty Teutonic vermin, had their origin in Germany, and raided both French and Swiss frontiers to the cruel discomfort of horses and cattle.

Meanwhile the blond, perplexed boy who was examining the papers of the two motorists, scratched his curly head and rubbed his deeply sunburned nose with a sunburned fist, a visible prey to indecision. Finally, at his slight gesture, his troopers trotted out and formed around the touring-car.

The boyish *sous-officier* looked pleasantly at the occupants of the car: "Have the complaisance to follow me—rather slowly if you please," he said; wheeled his horse, and trotted eastward toward the roofs of a little hamlet visible among the trees of the green and rolling countryside.

The young man threw in his clutch and advanced slowly, the cavalry trotting on either side with lances in stirrup-boots and slanting backward from the arm-loops.

There was a barrier beyond and some Alpine infantry on guard; and to the left, a paved street and houses. Half-way down this silent little street they halted: the *sous-officier* dismounted and opened the door of the tonneau, politely assisting the girl to alight. Her companion followed her, and the *sous-officier* conducted them into a stucco house, the worn limestone step of which gave directly on the grass-grown sidewalk.

"If your papers are in order, as they appear to be," said the youthful *sous-officier,* "you are expected in Delle. And if it is you indeed whom we expect, then you will know how to answer properly the questions of a gentleman in the adjoining room who is perhaps expecting you." And the young *sous-officier* opened a door, bowed them into the room beyond, and closed the door behind them. As they entered this room a civilian of fifty, ruddy, powerfully but trimly built, and wearing his white hair clipped close, rose from a swivel chair behind a desk littered with maps and papers.

"Good-afternoon," he said in English. "Be seated if you please. And if you will kindly let me have your papers—thank you."

When the young man and the girl were seated, their suave and ruddy host dropped back onto his swivel chair. For a long while he sat there absently caressing his trim, white moustache, studying their papers with unhurried and minute thoroughness.

Presently he lifted his cold, greyish eyes but not his head, like a man looking up over eyeglasses:

"You are this Kay McKay described here?" he inquired pleasantly. But in his very clear, very cold greyish eyes there was something suggesting the terrifying fixity of a tiger's.

"I am the person described," said the young man quietly.

"And you," turning only his eyes on the young girl, "are Miss Evelyn Erith?"

"I am."

"These, obviously, are your photographs?"

McKay smiled: "Obviously."

"Certainly. And all these other documents appear to be in order"—he laid them carelessly on his desk—*"if,"* he added, "Delle is your ultimate destination and terminal."

"We go farther," said McKay in a low voice.

"Not unless you have something further to offer me in the way of credentials," said the ruddy, white-haired Mr. Recklow, smiling his terrifying smile.

"I might mention a number," began McKay in a voice still lower, "if you are interested in the science of numbers!"

"Really. And what number do you think might interest me?"

"Seventy-six—for example."

"Oh," said the other; "in that case I shall mention the very interesting number, Seventy. And you, Miss Erith?" turning to the yellow-haired girl. "Have you any number to suggest that might interest me?"

"Seventy-seven," she said composedly. Recklow nodded:

"Do you happen to believe, either of you, that, at birth, the hours of our lives are already irrevocably numbered?"

Miss Erith said: "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Recklow got up, made them a bow, and reseated himself. He touched a handbell; the blond *sous-officier* entered.

"Everything is in order; take care of the car;

carry the luggage to the two rooms above," said Recklow.

To McKay and Miss Erith he added: "My name is John Recklow. If you want to rest before you wash up, your rooms are ready. You'll find me here or in the garden behind the house."

Toward sunset they found Recklow in the little garden, seated alone there on a bench looking up at the eastward mountains with the piercing, detached stare of a bird of prey. When they had seated themselves on the faded-green bench on either side of him he said, still gazing toward the mountains: "It's April up there. Dress warmly."

"Which is Mount Terrible?" inquired Miss Erith.

"Those are the lower ridges. The summit is not visible from where we sit," replied Recklow. And, to McKay: "There's some snow there still, I hear."

McKay's upward-turned face was a grim study. Beyond those limestone shouldering heights his terrible Calvary had begun—a progress that had ended in the wreckage of mind and soul had it not been for Chance and Evelyn Erith. After Mount Terrible, with its grim "Great Secret," had come the horrors of the prison camp at Holzminden and its nameless atrocities, his escape to New York, the Hun cipher orders to "silence him," his miraculous rescue and redemption by the girl at his side—and now their dual mission to probe the mystery of Mount Terrible.

"McKay," said Recklow, "I don't know what the particular mission may be that brings you and Miss Erith to the Franco-Swiss frontier. I have been

merely instructed to carry out your orders whenever you are in touch with me. And I am ready to do so."

"How much do you know about us?" asked McKay, turning to him an altered face almost marred by hard features which once had been only careworn and stern.

"I know you escaped from the Holzminden prison-camp in Germany; that you were inhumanly treated there by the Boche; that you entered the United States Intelligence Service; and that, whatever may be your business here, I am to help further it at your request." He looked at the girl: "As concerning Miss Erith, I know only that she is in the same Government service as yourself and that I am to afford her any aid she requests."

McKay said, slowly: "My orders are to trust you implicitly. On one subject only am I to remain silent—I am not to confide to anybody the particular object which brings us here."

Recklow nodded: "I understood as much. Also I have been instructed that the Boches are determined to discover your whereabouts and do you in before your mission is accomplished. You, probably, are aware of that, McKay?"

"Yes, I am."

"By the way—you know a Captain Herts?"

"Not personally."

"You've been in communication with him?"

"Yes, for some time."

"Did you wire him from Paris last Thursday?"

"Yes."

"Where did you wire him?"

"At his apartment at Toul."

"All right. He was here on Friday. . . . Somehow I feel uneasy. . . . He has a way of smiling too brilliantly. . . . I suppose, after these experiences I'll remain a suspicious grouch all my life—but his papers were in order . . . I don't know just why I don't care for that type of man. . . . You're bound for somewhere or other *via* Mount Terrible, I understand?"

"Yes."

"This Captain Herts sent three of his own people over the Swiss wire the other evening. Did you know about it?"

McKay looked worried: "I'm sorry," he said. "Captain Herts proposed some such assistance but I declined. It wasn't necessary. Two on such a job are plenty; half-a-dozen endanger it."

Recklow shrugged: "I can't judge, not knowing details. Tell me, if you don't mind; have you been bothered at all so far by Boche agents?"

"Yes," nodded Evelyn Erith.

"You've already had some serious trouble?"

McKay said: "Our ship was torpedoed off Strathlone Head. In Scotland a dozen camouflaged Boches caught me napping in spite of being warned. It was very humiliating, Recklow."

"You can't trust a soul on this frontier either," returned Recklow with emphasis. "You cannot trust the Swiss on this border. Over ninety per cent. of them are German-Swiss, speak German exclusively along the Alsatian border. They are, I think, loyal Swiss, but their origin, propinquity, customs and all

their affiliations incline them toward Germany rather than toward France.

"I believe, in the event of a Hun deluge, the Swiss on this border, and in the cantons adjoining, would defend their passes to the last man. They really are first of all good Swiss. But," he shrugged, "don't trust their friendship for America or for France; that's all."

Miss Erith nodded. McKay said: "How about the frontier? I understand both borders are wired now as well as patrolled. Are the wires electrically charged?"

"No. There was some talk of doing it on both sides, but the French haven't and I don't think the Swiss ever intended to. You can get over almost anywhere with a short ladder or by digging under." He smiled: "In fact," he said, "I took the liberty of having a sapling ladder made for you in case you mean to cross to-night."

"Many thanks. Yes; we cross to-night."

"You go by the summit path past the Crucifix on the peak?"

"No, by the neck of woods under the peak."

"That might be wiser. . . . One never knows. . . . I'm not quite at ease—Suppose I go as far as the Crucifix with you——"

"Thanks, no. I know the mountain and the neck of woods around the summit. I shall travel no path to-night."

There was a silence: Miss Erith's lovely face was turned tranquilly toward the flank of Mount Terri-

ble. Both men looked sideways at her as though thinking the same thing.

Finally Recklow said: "In the event of trouble—you understand—it means merely detention and internment while you are on Swiss territory. But—if you leave it and go north——" He did not say any more.

McKay's sombre eyes rested on his in grim comprehension of all that Recklow had left unsaid. Swift and savage as would be the fate of a man caught within German frontiers on any such business as he was now engaged in, the fate of a woman would be unspeakable.

If Miss Erith noticed or understood the silence between these two men she gave no sign of comprehension.

Soft, lovely lights lay across the mountains; higher rocks were still ruddy in the rays of the declining sun.

"Do the Boche planes ever come over?" asked McKay.

"They did in 1914. But the Swiss stopped it."

"Our planes—do they violate the frontier at all?"

"They never have, so far. Tell me, McKay, how about your maps?"

"Rather inaccurate—excepting one. I drew that myself from memory, and I believe it is fairly correct."

Recklow unfolded a little map, marked a spot on it with his pencil and passed it to McKay.

"It's for you," he said. "The sapling ladder lies under the filbert bushes in the gulley where I have

marked the boundary. Wait till the patrol passes. Then you have ten minutes. I'll come later and get the ladder if the patrol does not discover it."

A cat and her kittens came into the garden and Evelyn Erith seated herself on the grass to play with them, an attention gratefully appreciated by that feline family.

The men watched her with sober faces. Perhaps both were susceptible to her beauty, but there was also about this young American girl in all the freshness of her unmarred youth something that touched them deeply under the circumstances.

For this clean, wholesome girl was enlisted in a service the dangers of which were peculiarly horrible to her because of the bestial barbarity of the Boche. From the Hun—if ever she fell into their hands—the greatest mercy to be hoped for was a swift death unless she could forestall it with a swifter one from her own pistol carried for that particular purpose.

The death of youth is always shocking, yet that is an essential part of war. But this was no war within the meaning accepted by civilisation—this crusade of light against darkness, of cleanliness against corruption, this battle of normal minds against the diseased, perverted, and filthy ferocity of a people not merely reverted to honest barbarism, but also mentally mutilated, and now morally imbecile and utterly incompetent to understand the basic truths of that civilisation from which they had relapsed, and from which, God willing, they are to be ultimately and definitely kicked out forever.

The old mother cat lay on the grass blinking pleas-

antly at the setting sun; the kittens frisked and played with the grass-stem in Evelyn Erith's fingers, or chased their own ratty little tails in a perfect orgy of feline excitement.

Long bluish shadows spread delicate traceries on wall and grass; the sweet, persistent whistle of a blackbird intensified the calm of evening. It was hard to associate any thought of violence and of devastation with the blessed sunset calm and the clean fragrance of this land of misty mountains and quiet pasture so innocently aloof from the strife and passion of a dusty, noisy and struggling world.

Yet the red borders of that accursed land, the bloody altars of which were served by the priests of Baal, lay but a few scant kilometres to the north and east. And their stealthy emissaries were over the border and creeping like vermin among the uncontaminated fields of France.

"Even here," Recklow was saying, in a voice made low and cautious from habit, "the dirty Boche prowl among us under protean aspects. One can never tell, never trust anybody—what with one thing and another and the Alsatian border so close—and those German-Swiss—always to be suspected and often impossible to distinguish—with their pig-eyes and bushy flat-backed heads—from the genuine Boche. . . . Would Miss Erith like to have our little dinner served out here in the garden?"

Miss Erith was delightfully sure she would.

It was long after sunset, though still light, when the simple little meal ended; but they lingered over their coffee and cordial, exchanging ideas concerning

preparations for their departure, which was now close at hand.

The lilac bloom faded from mountain and woodland; already meadow and pasture lay veiled under the thickening dusk. The last day-bird had piped its sleepy "lights out"; bats were flying high. When the moon rose the first nightingale acclaimed the pallid lustre that fell in silver pools on walk and wall; and every flower sent forth its scented greeting.

Kay McKay and Evelyn Erith had been gone for nearly an hour; but Recklow still sat there at the little green table, an unlighted cigarette in his muscular fingers, his head slightly bent as though listening.

Once he rose as though on some impulse, went into the house, took a roll of fine wire, a small cowbell, a heavy pair of wire clippers and a pocket torch from his desk and pocketed them. A pair of automatic handcuffs he also took, and a dozen clips to fit the brace of pistols strapped under his armpits.

Then he returned to the garden; and for a long while he sat there, unstirring, just where the wall's shadow lay clean-cut across the grass, listening to the distant tinkle of cattle-bells on the unseen slope of Mount Terrible.

No shots had come from the patrol along the Franco-Swiss frontier; there was no sound save the ecstatic tumult of the nightingale drunk with moonlight, and, at intervals, the faint sound of a cowbell from those dark and distant pastures.

To this silent, listening man it seemed certain that

his two guests had now safely crossed the boundary at the spot he had marked for McKay on the detail map. Yet he remained profoundly uneasy.

He waited a few moments longer; heard nothing to alarm him; and then he left the garden, going out by way of the house, and turned to lock the front door behind him.

At that instant his telephone bell rang and he re-entered the house with a sudden premonition—an odd, unreasonable, but dreadful sort of certainty concerning what he was about to hear. Picking up the instrument he was thinking all the time: "It has to do with that damned Intelligence Officer! There *was* something wrong with him!"

There was.

Clearly over the wire from Toul came the information: "Captain Herts's naked body was discovered an hour ago in a thicket beside the Delle highway. He has been dead two weeks. Therefore the man you saw in Delle was impersonating him. Probably also he was Captain Herts's murderer and was wearing his uniform, carrying his papers, and riding his motor-cycle. Do your best to get him!"

Recklow, deadly cold and calm, asked a few questions. Then he hung up the instrument, turned and went out, locking the door behind him.

A few people were in the quiet street; here an Alpine soldier strolling with his sweetheart, there an old curé on his way to his little stone chapel, yonder a peasant in blouse and sabots plodding doggedly along about some detail of belated work that never ends for such as he. A few lanterns set in iron cages

projected over ancient doorways, lighting the street but dimly where it lay partly in deep shadow, partly illuminated by the silvery radiance of the moon.

Recklow turned into an alley smelling of stables, traversed it, and came out behind into a bushy pasture with a cleared space beyond. The place was rather misty now in the moonlight from the vapours of a cold little brook which ran foaming and clattering through it between banks thickset with fern.

And now Recklow moved very swiftly but quietly down through the misty, ferny valley to the filbert and hazel thicket just beyond; and went in among the bushes, treading cautiously upon the moist black mould.

There glimmered the French wires—merely a wide mesh and an ordinary barbed barrier overhead; but the fence was deeply ditched on the Swiss side. A man could climb over it; and Recklow started to do so; and came face to face in the moonlight with the French patrol. The recognition was mutual and noiseless:

"You passed my two people over?" whispered Recklow.

"An hour ago, *mon Capitaine.*"

"You've seen nobody else?"

"Nobody."

"Heard nothing?"

"Not a sound. They must have gone over the Swiss wire without interference, *mon Capitaine.*"

"You sometimes talk across with the Swiss sentinels?"

"Oh, yes, if I'm in that humour. You know, *mon*

Capitaine, that they're like the Boche, only tame."

"Not all."

"No, not all. But in a wolf-pack who can excuse sheepdogs? A Boche is always a Boche."

"All the same, when the Swiss sentry passes, speak to him and hold him while I get my ladder."

"At your orders, Captain."

"Listen. I am going over. When I return I shall leave with you a reel of wire and a cowbell. You comprehend? I do not wish anybody else to cross the French wire to-night."

"C'est bien, mon Capitaine."

Recklow went down into the bushy gulley. A few moments later the careless Swiss patrol came clumping along, rifle slung, pipe glowing and humming a tune as he passed. Presently the French sentry hailed him across the wire and the Swiss promptly halted for a bit of gossip concerning the pretty girls of Delle.

But, to Recklow's grim surprise, and before he could emerge from the bushes, no sooner were the two sentries engaged in lively gossip than three dark figures crept out on hands and knees from the long grass at the very base of the Swiss wire and were up the ladder which McKay had left and over it like monkeys before he could have prevented it even if he had dared.

Each in turn, reaching the top of the wire, set foot on the wooden post and leaped off into darkness—each except the last, who remained poised, then twisted around as though caught by the top barbed strand.

And Recklow saw the figure was a woman's, and

that her short skirt had become entangled in the wire.

In an instant he was after her; she saw him, strove desperately to free herself, tore her skirt loose, and jumped. And Recklow jumped after her, landing among the wet ferns on his feet and seizing her as she tried to rise from where she had fallen.

She struggled and fought him in silence, but his iron clutch was on her and he dragged her by main force through the woods parallel with the Swiss wire until, breathless, powerless, impotent, she gave up the battle and suffered him to force her along until they were far beyond earshot of the patrol and of her two companions as well, in case they should return to the wire to look for her.

For ten minutes, holding her by the arm, he pushed forward up the wooded slope. Then, when it was safe to do so, he halted, jerked her around to face him, and flashed his pocket torch. And he saw a handsome, perspiring, sullen girl, staring at him out of dark eyes dilated by terror or by fury—he was not quite sure which.

She wore the costume of a peasant of the canton bordering the wire; and she looked like that type of German-Swiss—handsome, sensual, bad-tempered, but not stupid.

"Well," he said in French, "you can explain yourself now, mademoiselle. *Allons!* Who and what are you? *Dites!*"

"What are you? A robber?" she gasped, jerking her arm free.

"If you thought so why didn't you call for help?"

"And be shot at? Do you take me for a fool?

What are you—a Douanier then? A smuggler?"

"You answer *me!*" he retorted. "What were you doing—crossing the wire at night?"

"Can't a girl keep a rendezvous without the custom-agents treating her so barbarously?" she panted, one hand flat on her tumultuous bosom.

"Oh, that was it, was it?"

"I do not deny it."

"Who is your lover—on the French side?"

"And if he happens to be an Alpinist?"—she shrugged, still breathing fast and irregularly, picking up the torn edge of her wool skirt and fingering the rent.

"Really. An Alpinist? A rendezvous in Delle, eh? And who were your two friends?"

"Boys from my canton."

"Is that so?"

Her breast still rose and fell unevenly; she turned her pretty, insolent eyes on him:

"After all, what business is it of yours? Who are you, anyway? If you are French you can do nothing. If you are Swiss take me to the nearest *poste.*"

"Who were those two men?" repeated Recklow.

"Ask them."

"No; I think I'll take you back to France."

The girl became silent at that but her attitude defied him. Even when he snapped an automatic handcuff over one wrist she smiled incredulously.

But the jeering expression on her dark, handsome features altered when they approached the Swiss wire. And when Recklow produced a pair of

heavy wire-cutters all defiance died out in her face.

"Make a sound and I'll simply shoot you," he whispered.

"W-what is it you want with me?" she asked in a ghost of a voice.

"The truth."

"I told it."

"You did not. You are German."

"Believe what you like, but I am on neutral territory. Let me go."

"You *are* German! For God's sake admit it or we'll be too late!"

"What?"

"Admit it, I say. Do you want those two Americans to get away?"

"What—Americans?" stammered the girl. "I d-don't know what you mean——"

Recklow laughed under his breath, unlocked the handcuffs.

"Echt Deutsch," he whispered in German—"and *zero-two-six.* A good hint to you!"

"Waidman's Heil!" said the girl faintly. "O God! what a fright you gave me. . . . There's a man at Delle—we were warned—Seventy is his number, Recklow—a devil Yankee——"

"A swine! a fathead, sleeping all day in his garden, too drunk to open despatches!" sneered Recklow.

"We were warned against him," she insisted. Recklow laughed his contempt of Recklow and spat upon the dead leaves.

"Stupid one, what then is closest to the Yankee

heart? I was sent here to buy this terrible devil Yankee, Recklow. That is how one deals with Yankees. With dollars."

"Is that why you are here?"

"And to watch for McKay and the young woman with him!"

"The Erith woman!"

"That is her barbarous name, I believe. What is your number?"

"Four-two-four. Oh, what a fright you gave me. What is your name?"

"That is against regulations."

"I know. What is it, all the same. . . . Mine is Helsa Kampf."

"Mine is Johann Wolkcer."

"Wolkcer? Is it Polish?"

"God knows where we Germans had our origin. . . . Who are your companions, Fräulein?"

"An Irish-American. Jim Macniff, and a British revolutionist, Harry Skelton. Others await us on Mount Terrible—Germans in Swiss uniforms."

"You'd better keep an eye on Macniff and Skelton," grumbled Recklow.

"No; they're to be trusted. We nearly caught McKay and the Erith girl in Scotland; they killed four of our people and hurt two others. . . . Listen, comrade Wolkcer, if a trodden path ascends Mount Terrible, as Skelton pretended, you and I had better look for it. Can you find your way back to where we crossed the wire? The dry bed of the torrent was to have guided us."

"I know a quicker way," said Recklow. "Come on."

The girl took his hand confidingly and walked beside him, holding one arm before her face to shield her eyes from branches in the darkness.

They had gone, perhaps, a dozen paces when a man stepped from behind a great beech-tree, peered after them, then turned and hurried down the slope to where the Swiss wire stretched glistening under the stars. He ran along this wire until he came to the dry bed of a torrent.

Up this he stumbled under the forest patches of alternate moonlight and shadow until he came to a hard path crossing it on a masonry viaduct.

"Harry!" he called in a husky, quavering voice, choking for breath. "Cripes, Harry—where in hell are you?"

"Here, you blighter! What's the bully row? Where's Helsa———"

"With Recklow!"

"What!!"

"Double-crossed us!" he whispered; "I seen her! I was huntin' along the fence when I come on them, thick as thieves. She's crossed us; she's hollered! Oh, Cripes, Harry, Helsa has went an' squealed!"

"Helsa!!"

"Yes, Helsa—I wouldn't 'a' believed it! But I seen 'em. I seen 'em whispering. I seen her take his hand an' lead him up through the trees. She's squealed on us! She's bringing Recklow———"

"Recklow! Are you sure?"

"I got closte to 'em. There was enough moon-

light to spot him by. I know the cut of him, don't I? That wuz him all right." He wiped his face on his sleeve. "Now what are we goin' to do?" he demanded brokenly. "Where do we get off, Harry?"

Skelton appeared dazed:

"The slut," he kept repeating without particular emphasis, "the little slut! I thought she'd fallen for me. I thought she was my girl. And now to do that! And now to go for to do us in like that——"

"Well, we're all right, ain't we?" quavered Macniff. "We make our getaway all right, don't we? Don't we?"

"I can't understand——"

"Say, listen, Harry. To blazes with Helsa! She's hollered and that ends her. But can we make our getaway? And how about them Germans waitin' for us by that there crucifix on top of this mountain? Where do they get off? Does this guy, Recklow, get them?"

"He can't get six men alone."

"Well, can't he sic the Swiss onto 'em?"

A terrible doubt arose in Skelton's mind: "Recklow wouldn't come here alone. He's got his men in these woods! That damn woman fixed all this. It's a plant! She's framed us! What do I care about the Germans on the mountain! To hell with them. I'm going!"

"Where?"

"Into Alsace. Where do you think?"

"You gotta cross the mountain, then—or go back into France."

But neither man dared do that now. There was

only one way out, and that lay over Mount Terrible —either directly past the black crucifix towering from its limestone cairn on the windy peak, or just below through a narrow belt of woods.

"It ain't so bad," muttered Macniff. "If the Germans up there catch McKay and the girl they'll kill 'em and clear out."

"Yes, but they don't know that the Americans have crossed the wire. The neck of woods is open!"

"McKay may go over the peak."

"McKay knows this mountain," grumbled Skelton. "He's a fox, too. You don't think he'd travel an open path, do you? And how can we catch him now? We were to have warned the Germans that the two had crossed the wire and then our only chance was to string out across that neck of woods between the peak and the cliffs. That's the way McKay will travel, not on a path in full moonlight. Aw—I'm sick—what with Helsa doing that to me—I can't get over it!"

Macniff started nervously and began to run along the path, upward:

"Beat it, Harry," he called back over his shoulder; "it's the only way out o' this now."

"God," whimpered Skelton, "if I ever get my hooks on Helsa!" His voice ended in a snivel but his features were white and ferocious as he started running to overtake Macniff.

Recklow, breathing easily, his iron frame insensible to any fatigue from the swift climb, halted finally at the base of the abrupt slope which marked

the beginning of the last ascent to the summit.

The girl, Helsa, speechless from exertion, came reeling up among the rocks and leaned gasping against a pine.

"Now," said Recklow, "you can wait here for your two friends. We've come by a short cut and they won't be here for more than half an hour. What's the matter? Are you ill?" for the girl, overcome by the speed of the ascent, had dropped to the ground at the foot of the tree and sat there, her head resting against the trunk. Her eyes were closed and she was breathing convulsively.

"Are you ill?" he repeated, bending over her.

She heard him, opened her eyes, then shook her head faintly.

"All right. You're a brave girl. You'll get your breath in a few minutes. There's no hurry. You can take your time. Your friends will be along in half an hour or so. Wait here for them. I am going on to warn the Germans by the Crucifix that the two Americans are across the Swiss wire."

The girl, still speechless, wiped the blinding sweat from her eyes and tried to clear the dishevelled hair from her face. Then, with a great effort she found her voice:

"But the—Americans—will pass—first!" she gasped. "I can't—stay here alone."

"If they do pass, what of it? They can't see you. Let them pass. We hold the summit and the neck of the woods. Tell that to Macniff and Skelton when they come; that's what I want you here for. I want

to cut off the Yankees' retreat. Do you understand?"

"I—understand," she breathed.

"You'll carry out my orders?"

She nodded, strove to straighten up, then with both hands on her breast she sank back utterly exhausted. Recklow looked at her a moment in grim silence, then turned and walked away.

After a few steps he crossed his arms with a quick, peculiar movement and drew from under his armpits the pair of automatic pistols.

Like all "forested" forests, the woods on that flank of Mount Terrible were regular and open—big trees with no underbrush and a smooth carpet of needles and leaves under foot. And Recklow now walked on very fast in the dim light until he came to a thinning among the trees where just ahead of him stars shimmered level in the vast sky-gulf above Alsace.

Here was the precipice; here the narrow, wooded neck—the only way across the mountain except by the peak path and the Crucifix.

Now Recklow took from his pockets his spool of very fine wire, attached it low down to a slim young pine, carried it across to the edge of the cliff, and attached the other end to a sapling on the edge of the ledge. On this wire he hung his cowbell and hooked the little clapper inside.

Then, squatting down on the pine needles, he sat motionless as one of the forest shadows, a pistol in either hand, and his cold grey eyes ablaze.

So silvery the pools of light from the planets, so

depthless the shadows, that the forest around him seemed but a vast mosaic in mother-of-pearl and ebony.

There was no sound, no murmur of cattle-bells from mountain pastures now, nothing stirring through the magic aisles where the matched columns of beech and pine towered in the perfect symmetry of all planted forests.

He had not been there very long; the luminous dial of his wrist-watch told him that—when, although he had heard no sound on the soft carpet of pine needles, something suddenly hit the wire and the cowbell tinkled in the darkness.

Recklow was on his feet in an instant and running south along the wire. It might have been a deer crossing to the eastern slope; it might have been the enemy; he could not tell; he could see nothing stirring. And there seemed to be nothing for him to do but to take his chances.

"McKay!" he called in a low voice.

Then, amid the checkered pools of light and shade among the trees a shadow moved.

"McKay! It's Number Seventy. If it's you, call out your number, because I've got you over my sights and I shoot straight!"

"Seventy-six and Seventy-seven!" came McKay's cautious voice. "Good heavens, Recklow, why have you come up here?"

"Don't touch the wire again," Recklow warned him. "Drop flat both of you, and crawl under! Crawl toward my voice!"

As he spoke he came toward them; and they rose

from their knees among the shadows, pistols drawn.

"There's been some dirty business," said Recklow briefly. "Three enemy spies went over the Swiss wire about an hour after you left Delle. There are half a dozen Boches on the peak by the Crucifix. And that's why I'm here, if you want to know."

There was a silence. Recklow looked hard at McKay, then at Evelyn Erith, who was standing quietly beside him.

"Can we get through this neck of woods?" asked McKay calmly.

"We can hold our own here against a regiment," said Recklow. "No Swiss patrol is likely to cross the summit before daybreak. So if our cowbell jingles again to-night after I have once called halt! —let the Boche have it." To Evelyn he said: "Better step back here behind this ledge." And, when McKay had followed, he told them exactly what had happened. "I'm afraid it's not going to be very easy going for you," he added.

With the alarming knowledge that they had to do once more with their uncanny enemies of Isla Water, McKay and Evelyn Erith looked at each other rather grimly. Recklow produced his clay pipe, inspected it, but did not venture to light it.

"I wonder," he said carelessly, "what that she-Boche is doing over yonder by the summit path. . . . Her name is Helsa. . . . She's not bad looking," he added in a musing voice—"that young she-Boche. . . . I wonder what she's up to now? Her people ought to be along pretty soon if they've travelled by the summit path from Delle."

They had indeed travelled by the summit path—not *on* it, but parallel to it through woods, over rocks, made fearful by what they believed to be the treachery of the girl, Helsa.

For this reason they dared not take the trodden way, dreading ambush. Yet they had to cross the peak; they dared not remain in a forest where they believed Recklow was hunting them with many men and their renegade comrade, Helsa, to guide them.

As they toiled upward, Macniff heard Skelton fiercely muttering sometimes, sometimes whining curses on this girl who had betrayed them both—who had betrayed him in particular. Over and over again he repeated his dreary litany: "No, by God, I didn't think she'd do it to me. All I want is to get my hooks on her; that's all I want—just that."

Toward dawn they had reached the base of the cone where the last rocky slope slanted high above them.

"Cripes," panted Macniff, "I can't make that over them rocks! I gotta take it by the path. Wot's the matter, Harry? Wot y' lookin' at?" he added, following Skelton's fascinated stare. Then: "Well, f'r Christ's sake!"

The girl, Helsa, was coming toward them through the trees.

"Where have you been?" she demanded. "Have you seen the Americans? I've been waiting here beside the path. They haven't passed. I met one of our agents in the woods—there was a misunderstanding at first——"

She stopped, stepped nearer, peered into Skel-

ton's shadowy face: "Harry! What's the matter? Wh-why do you look at me that way—what are you doing! Let go of me——"

But Skelton had seized her by one arm and Macniff had her by the other.

"Are you crazy?" she demanded, struggling between them.

Skelton spoke first, but she scarcely recognised the voice for his: "Who was that man you were talking to down by the Swiss wire?"

"I've told you. He's one of us. His name is Wolkcer——"

"What!"

"Wolkcer! That is his name——"

"Spell it backward!" barked Skelton. "We know what you have done to us! You have sold us to Recklow! That's what you done!"

"W-what!" stammered the girl. But Skelton, inarticulate with rage, began striking her and jerking her about as though he were trying to tear her to pieces. Only when the girl reeled sideways, limp and deathly white under his fury, did he find his voice, or the hoarse unhuman rags of it:

"Damn you!" he gasped, "you'll sell me out, will you? I'll show you! I'll fix you, you dirty slut——"

Suddenly he started up the path to the summit dragging the half-conscious girl. Macniff ran along on the other side to help.

"Wot y' goin' to do with her, Harry?" he panted. "I ain't got no stomach for scraggin' her. I ain't for no knifin'. W'y don't you shove her off the top?"

But Skelton strode on, half-dragging the girl,

and muttering that she had sold him and that he knew how to "fix" a girl who double-crossed him.

And now the gaunt, black Crucifix came into view, stark against the paling eastern sky with its life-sized piteous figure hanging there under the crown of thorns.

Macniff looked up at the carved wooden image, then, at a word from Skelton, dropped the girl's limp arm.

The girl opened her eyes and stood swaying there, dazed.

Skelton began to laugh in an unearthly way: "Where the hell are you Germans?" he called out. "Come out of your holes, damn you. Here's one of your own kind who's sold us all out to the Yankees!"

Twice the girl tried to speak but Skelton shook the voice out of her quivering lips as a shadowy figure rose from the scrubby growth behind the Crucifix. Then another rose, another, and many others looming against the sky.

Macniff had begun to speak in German as they drew around him. Presently Skelton broke in furiously:

"All right, then! That's the case. She sold us. She sold *me!* But she's German. And it's your business. But if you Germans will listen to me you'll shove her against that pile of rocks and shoot her."

The girl had begun to cry now: "It's a lie! It's a lie!" she sobbed. "If it was Recklow who talked to me I didn't know it. I thought he was one of us,

Harry! Don't go away! For God's sake, don't leave me with those men——"

Macniff sneered as he slouched by her: "They're Germans, ain't they? Wot are you squealin' for?"

"Harry! Harry!" she wailed—for her own countrymen had her now, held her fast, thrust a dozen pig-eyed scowling visages close to hers, muttering, making animal sounds at her.

Once she screamed. But Skelton seated himself on a rock, his back toward her, his head buried in his hands.

To his dull, throbbing ears came now only the heavy trample of boots among the rocks, guttural noises, a wrenching sound, then the clatter of rolling stones.

Macniff, squatting beside him, muttered uneasily, speculating upon what was being done behind him. But with German justice upon a German he had no desire to interfere, and he had no stomach to witness it, either.

"Why don't they shoot her and be done?" he murmured huskily. And, later: "I can't make out what they're doing. Can you, Harry?"

But Skelton neither answered nor stirred. After a while he rose, not looking around, and strode off down the eastern slope, his hands pressed convulsively over his ears. Macniff slouched after him, listening for the end.

They had gone a mile, perhaps, when Skelton's agonised voice burst its barriers: "I couldn't—I couldn't stand it—to hear the shots!"

"I ain't heard no shots," remarked Macniff.

There had been no shots fired. . . .

And now in the ghastly light of dawn the Germans on Mount Terrible continued methodically the course of German justice.

Two of them, burly, huge-fisted, wrenched the Christ from the weather-beaten Crucifix which they had uprooted from the summit of its ancient cairn of rocks, and pulled out the rusty spike-like nails.

The girl was already half dead when they laid her on the Crucifix and nailed her there. After they had raised the cross and set it on the summit she opened her eyes.

Several of the Germans laughed, and one of them threw pebbles at her until she died.

Just before sunrise they went down to explore the neck of woods, but found nobody. The Americans had been gone for a long time. So they went back to the cross where the dead girl hung naked against the sky and wrote on a bit of paper:

"Here hangs an enemy of Germany."

And, the Swiss patrol being nearly due, they scattered, moving off singly, through the forest toward the frontier of the great German Empire.

A little later the east turned gold and the first sunbeam touched the Crucifix on Mount Terrible.

CHAPTER VII

THE FORBIDDEN FOREST

WHEN the news of a Hun atrocity committed on Swiss territory was flashed to Berne, the Federal Assembly instantly suppressed it and went into secret session. Followed another session, *in camera,* of the Federal Council, whose seven members sat all night long envisaging war with haggard faces. And something worse than war when they remembered the Forbidden Forest and the phantom Canton of Les Errues.

For war between the Swiss Republic and the Hun seemed very, very near during that ten days in Berne, and neither the National Council nor the Council of the States in joint and in separate consultation could see anything except a dreadful repetition of that eruption of barbarians which had overwhelmed the land in 400 A. D. till every pass and valley vomited German savages. And even more than that they feared the terrible reckoning with the nation and with civilisation when war laid naked the heart-breaking secret of the Forbidden Forest of Les Errues.

No! War could not be. A catastrophe more vital than war threatened Switzerland—the world-wide revelation of a secret which, exposed, would

throw all civilisation into righteous fury and the Swiss Republic itself into revolution.

And this sinister, hidden thing which must deter Switzerland from declaring war against the Boche was a part of the Great Secret: and a man and a woman in the Secret Service of the United States, lying hidden among the forests below the white shoulder of Mount Thusis, were beginning to guess more about that secret than either of them had dared to imagine.

There where they lay together side by side among Alpine roses in full bloom—there on the crag's edge, watching the Swiss soldiery below combing the flanks of Mount Terrible for the perpetrators of that hellish murder at the shrine, these two people could see the Via Mala which had been the Via Crucis—the tragic Golgotha for that poor girl Helsa Kampf.

They could almost see the gaunt, black cross itself from which the brutish Boches had kicked the carved and weather-beaten figure of Christ in order to nail to the massive cross the living hands and feet of that half-senseless girl whom they supposed had betrayed them.

The man lying there on the edge of the chasm was Kay McKay; the girl stretched on her stomach beside him was Evelyn Erith.

All that day they watched the Swiss soldiers searching Mount Terrible; saw a red fox steal from the lower thickets and bolt between the legs of the beaters who swung their rifle-butts at the streak of ruddy fur; saw little mountain birds scatter into

flight, so closely and minutely the soldiers searched; saw even a big *auerhahn* burst into thunderous flight from the ferns to a pine and from the pine out across the terrific depths of space below the white shoulder of Thusis. At night the Swiss camp-fires glimmered on the rocks of Mount Terrible while, fireless, McKay and Miss Erith lay in their blankets under heaps of dead leaves on the knees of Thusis, cold as the moon that silvered their forest beds.

But it was the last of the soldiery on Mount Terrible; for dawn revealed their dead fire and a summit untenanted save by the stark and phantom crucifix looming through rising mists.

Evelyn Erith still slept; McKay fed the three carrier-pigeons, washed himself at the snow-rill in the woods, then went over to the crag's gritty edge under which for three days now the ghoulish clamour of a *lämmergeier* had seldom ceased. And now, as McKay peered down, two stein-adlers came flapping to the shelf on which hung something that seemed to flutter at times like a shred of cloth stirred by the abyss winds.

The lämmergeier, huge and horrible with scarlet eyes ablaze, came out on the shelf of rock and yelped at the great rock-eagles; but, if something indeed lay dead there, possibly it was enough for all—or perhaps the vulture-like bird was too heavily gorged to offer battle. McKay saw the rock-eagles alight heavily on the shelf, then, squealing defiance, hulk forward, undeterred by the hobgoblin tumult of the lammergeier.

McKay leaned over the gulf as far as he dared.

He could get down to the shelf; he was now convinced of that. Only fear of being seen by the soldiers on Mount Terrible had hitherto prevented him.

Rope and steel-shod stick aided him. Sapling and shrub stood loyally as his allies. The rock-eagles heard him coming and launched themselves overboard into the depthless sea of air; the lämmergeier, a huge, foul mass of distended feathers, glared at him out of blazing scarlet eyes; and all around was his vomit and casting in a mass of bloody human bones and shreds of clothing.

And it was in that nauseating place of peril, confronting the grisly thing that might have hurled him outward into space with one wing-blow had it not been clogged with human flesh and incapable, that McKay reached for the remnants of the dead Hun's clothing and, facing the feathered horror, searched for evidence and information.

Never had he been so afraid; never had he so loathed a living creature as this unclean and spectral thing that sat gibbering and voiding filth at him—the ghastly symbol of the Hunnish empire itself befouling the clean-picked bones of the planet it was dismembering.

He had his pistol but dared not fire, not knowing what ears across the gorge might hear the shot, not knowing either whether the death-agonies of the enormous thing might hurl him a thousand feet to annihilation.

So he took what he found in the rags of clothing and climbed back as slowly and stealthily as he had come.

And found Miss Erith cross-legged on the dead leaves braiding her yellow hair in the first sun-rays. Tethered by long cords attached to anklets over one leg the three pigeons walked busily around under the trees gorging themselves on last year's mast.

That afternoon they dared light a fire and made soup from the beef tablets in their packs—the first warm food they had tasted in a week.

A declining sun painted the crags in raw splendour; valleys were already dusky; a vast stretch of misty glory beyond the world of mountains to the north was Alsace; southward there was no end to the myriad snowy summits, cloud-like, piled along the horizon. The brief meal ended.

McKay set a pannikin of water to boil and returned to his yellow-haired comrade. Like some slim Swiss youth—some boy mountaineer—and clothed like one, Miss Erith sat at the foot of a tree in the ruddy sunlight studying once more the papers which McKay had discovered that morning among the bloody débris on the shelf of rock.

As he came up he knew he had never seen anything as pretty in his life, but he did not say so. Any hint of sentiment that might have budded had been left behind when they crossed the Swiss wire beyond Delle. An enforced intimacy such as theirs tended to sober them both; and if at times it preoccupied them, that was an added reason not only to ignore it but also to conceal any effort it might entail to take amiably but indifferently a situation foreseen, de-

liberately embraced, yet scarcely entirely discounted.

The girl was so pretty in her youth's clothing; her delicate ankles and white knees bare between the conventional thigh-length of green embossed leather breeches, rough green stockings, and fleece-lined hob-nailed shoes. And over the boy's shirt the mountaineer's frieze jacket!—with staghorn buttons. And the rough wool cuff fell on the hands of a duchess! —pistols at either hip, and a murderous Bavarian knife in front.

Glancing up at him where he stood under the red pine beside her: "I'll do the dishes presently," she said.

"I'll do them," he remarked, his eyes involuntarily seeking her hands.

A pink flush grew on her weather-tanned face—or perhaps it was the reddening sunlight stealing through some velvet piny space in the forest barrier. If it was a slight blush in recognition of his admiration she wondered at her capacity for blushing. However, Marie Antoinette coloured from temple to throat on the scaffold. But the girl knew that the poor Queen's fate was an enviable one compared to what awaited her if she fell into the hands of the Hun.

McKay seated himself near her. The sunny silence of the mountains was intense. Over a mass of alpine wild flowers hanging heavy and fragrant between rocky clefts two very large and intensely white butterflies fought a fairy battle for the favours of a third—a dainty, bewildering creature, clinging to an unopened bud, its snowy wings a-quiver.

The girl's golden eyes noted the pretty courtship, and her side glance rested on the little bride to be with an odd, indefinite curiosity, partly interrogative, partly disdainful.

It seemed odd to the girl that in this Alpine solitude life should be encountered at all. And as for life's emotions, the frail, frivolous, ephemeral fury of these white-winged ghosts of daylight, embattled and all tremulous with passion, seemed exquisitely amazing to her here between the chaste and icy immobility of white-veiled peaks and the terrific twilight of the world's depths below.

McKay, studying the papers, glanced up at Miss Erith. A bar of rosy sunset light slanted almost level between them.

"There seems to be," he said slowly, "only one explanation for what you and I read here. The Boche has had his filthy fist on the throat of Switzerland for fifty years."

"And what is 'Les Errues' to which these documents continually refer?" asked the girl.

"Les Errues is the twenty-seventh canton of Switzerland. It is the strip of forest and crag which includes all the northeastern region below Mount Terrible. It is a canton, a secret canton unrepresented in the Federal Assembly—a region without human population—a secret slice of Swiss wilderness *owned by Germany!*"

"Kay, do you believe that?"

"I am sure of it now. It is that wilderness into which I stumbled. It overlooks the terrain in Alsace where for fifty years the Hun has been busy day and

night with his sinister, occult operations. Its entrance, if there be any save by the way of avalanches —the way I entered—must be guarded by the Huns; its only exit into Hunland. That is Les Errues. That is the region which masks the Great Secret of the Hun."

He dropped the papers and, clasping his knees in his arms, sat staring out into the infernal blaze of sunset.

"The world," he said slowly, "pays little attention to that agglomeration of cantons called Switzerland. The few among us who know anything about its government might recollect that there are twenty-six cantons—the list begins, Aargau, Appenzell, Ausser-Rhoden, Inner-Rhoden—you may remember—and ends with Valais, Vaud, Zug, and Zurich. And Les Errues is the twenty-seventh canton!"

"Yes," said the girl in a low voice, "the evidence lies at your feet."

"Surely, surely," he muttered, his fixed gaze lost on the crimson celestial conflagration. She said, thinking aloud, and her clear eyes on him:

"Then, of the Great Secret, we have learned this much anyway—that there exists in Switzerland a secret canton called Les Errues; that it is practically Hun territory; that it masks what they call their Great Secret; that their ownership or domination of Les Errues is probably a price paid secretly by the Swiss government for its national freedom and that this arrangement is absolutely unknown to anybody in the world outside of the Imperial Hun government and the few Swiss who have inherited, politically, a

terrible knowledge of this bargain dating back, probably, from 1870."

"That is the situation we are confronting," admitted McKay calmly.

She said with perfect simplicity: "Of course we must go into Les Errues."

"Of course, comrade. How?"

He had no plan—could have none. She knew it. Her question was merely meant to convey to him a subtle confirmation of her loyalty and courage. She scarcely expected to escape a dreadful fate on this quest—did not quite see how either of them could really hope to come out alive. But that they could discover the Great Secret of the Hun, and convey to the world by means of their pigeons some details of the discovery, she felt reasonably certain. She had much faith in the arrangements they had made to do this.

"One thing worries me a lot," remarked McKay pleasantly.

"Food supply?"

He nodded.

She said: "Now that the Boche have left Mount Terrible—except that wretched creature whose bones lie on the shelf below—we might venture to kill whatever game we can find."

"I'm going to," he said. "The Swiss troops have cleared out. I've got to risk it. Of course, down there in Les Errues, some Hun guarding some secret chamois trail into the forbidden wilderness may hear our shots."

"We shall have to take that chance," she remarked.

He said in the low, quiet voice which always thrilled her a little: "You poor child—you are hungry."

"So are you, Kay."

"Hungry? These rations act like cocktails: I could barbecue a roebuck and finish him with you at one sitting!"

"Monsieur et Madame Gargantua," she mocked him with her enchanting laughter. Then, wistful: "Kay, did you see that very fat and saucy auerhahn which the Swiss soldiers scared out of the pines down there?"

"I did," said McKay. "My mouth watered."

"He was quite as big as a wild turkey," sighed the girl.

"They're devils to get," said McKay, "and with only a pistol—well, anyway we'll try to-night. Did you mark that bird?"

"Mark him?"

"Yes; mark him down?"

She shook her pretty head.

"Well, I did," grinned McKay. "It's habit with a man who shoots. Besides, seeing him was like a bit of Scotland—their auerhahn is kin to the blackcock and capercailzie. So I marked him to the skirt of Thusis, yonder—in line with that needle across the gulf and, through it, to that bunch of pinkish-stemmed pines—there where the brook falls into silver dust above that gorge. He'll lie there. Just before daybreak he'll mount to the top of one of those

pines. We'll hear his yelping. That's our only chance at him."

"Could you ever hit him in the dark of dawn, Kay?"

"With a pistol? And him atop a pine? No, not under ordinary conditions. But I'm hungry, dear Yellow-hair, and that is not all: you are hungry——" He looked at her so intently that the colour tinted her face and the faint little thrill again possessed her.

Her glance stole involuntarily toward the white butterflies. One had disappeared. The two others, drunk with their courtship, clung to a scented blossom.

Gravely Miss Erith lifted her young eyes to the eternal peaks—to Thusis, icy, immaculate, chastely veiled before the stealthy advent of the night.

Oddly, yet without fear, death seemed to her very near. And love, also—both in the air, both abroad and stirring, yet neither now of vital consequence. Only service meant anything now to this young man so near her—to herself. And after that—after accomplishment—love?—death?—either might come to them then. And find them ready, perhaps.

The awful, witch-like screaming of the lämmergeier saluted the falling darkness where he squatted, a huge huddle of unclean plumage amid the debris of decay and death.

"I don't believe I could have faced that," murmured the girl. "You have more courage than I have, Kay."

"No! I was scared stiff. A bird like that could break a man's arm with a wing-blow. . . . That—

that thing he'd been feeding on—it must have been a Boche of high military rank to carry these papers."

"You could not find out?"

"There were only the rags of his mufti there and these papers inside them. Nothing to identify him personally—not a tag, not a shred of anything. Unless the geier bolted it——"

She turned aside in disgust at the thought.

"When do you suppose he happened to fall to his death there, Kay?"

"In the darkness when the Huns scattered after the crucifixion. Perhaps the horror of it came suddenly upon him—God knows what happened when he stepped outward into depthless space and went crashing down to hell."

They had stayed their hunger on the rations. It was bitter cold in the leafy lap of Thusis, but they feared to light a fire that night.

McKay fed and covered the pigeons in their light wicker box which was carried strapped to his mountain pack.

Evelyn Erith fell asleep in her blanket under the dead leaves piled over her by McKay. After awhile he slept too; but before dawn he awoke, took a flashlight and his pistol and started down the slope for the wood's edge.

Her sweet, sleepy voice halted him: "Kay dear?"

"Yes, Yellow-hair."

"May I go?"

"Don't you want to sleep?"

"No."

She sat up under a tumbling shower of silvery

dead leaves, shook out her hair, gathered it and twisted it around her brow like a turban.

Then, flashing her own torch, she sprang to her feet and ran lightly down to where the snow brook whirled in mossy pools below.

When she came back he took her cold smooth little hand fresh from icy ablutions: "We must beat it," he said; "that auerhahn won't stay long in his pine-tree after dawn. Extinguish your torch."

She obeyed and her warning fingers clasped his more closely as together they descended the path of light traced out before them by his electric torch.

Down, down, down they went under hard-wood and evergreen, across little fissures full of fern, skirting great slabs of rock, making détours where tangles checked progress.

Through tree-tops the sky glittered—one vast sheet of stars; and in the forest was a pale lustre born of this celestial splendour—a pallid dimness like that unreal day which reigns in the regions of the dead.

"We might meet the shade of Helen here," said the girl, "or of Eurydice. This is a realm of spirits. . . . We may be one with them very soon—you and I. Do you suppose we shall wander here among these trees as long as time lasts?"

"It's all right if we're together, Yellow-hair."

There was no accent from his fingers clasped in hers; none in hers either.

"I hope we'll be together, then," she said.

"Will you search for me, Yellow-hair?"

"Yes. Will you, Kay?"

"Always."

"And I—always—until I find you or you find me." . . . Presently she laughed gaily under her breath: "A solemn bargain, isn't it?"

"More solemn than marriage."

"Yes," said the girl faintly.

Something went crashing off into the woods as they reached the hogback which linked them with the group of pines whither the big game-bird had pitched into cover. Perhaps it was a roe deer; McKay flashed the direction in vain.

"If it were a Boche?" she whispered.

"No; it sounded like a four-legged beast. There are chamois and roe deer and big mountain hares along these heights."

They went on until the hog-back of sheer rock loomed straight ahead, and beyond, against a paling sky, the clump of high pines toward which they were bound.

McKay extinguished his torch and pocketed it.

"The sun will lead us back, Yellow-hair," he whispered. "Now hold very tightly to my hand, for it's a slippery and narrow way we tread together."

The rocks were glassy. But there were bushes and mosses; and presently wild grass and soil on the other side.

All around them, now, the tall pines loomed, faintly harmonious in the rising morning breeze which, in fair weather, always blows *down* from the upper peaks into the valleys. Into the shadows they passed together a little way; then halted. The girl rested one shoulder against a great pine, leaning

there and facing him where he also rested, listening.

There reigned in the woods that intense stillness which precedes dawn—an almost painful tension resembling apprehension. Always the first faint bird-note breaks it; then silence ends like a deep sigh exhaling and death seems very far away.

Now above them the stars had grown very dim; and presently some faded out.

And after a little while a small mountain bird twittered sleepily. Then unseen by them, the east glimmered like a sheet of tarnished silver. And out over the dark world of mountains, high above the solitude, rang the uncanny cry of an auerhahn.

Again the big, unseen bird saluted the coming day. McKay stole forward drawing his pistol and the girl followed.

The weird outcry of the auerhahn guided them, sounding from somewhere above among the black crests of the pines, nearer at hand, now, clearer, closer, more weird, until McKay halted peering upward, his pistol poised.

As yet the crests of the pines were merely soft blots above. Yet as they stood straining their eyes upward, striving to discover the location of the great bird by its clamour, vaguely the branches began to take shape against the greying sky.

Clearer, more distinct they grew until feathery masses of pine-needles stood clustered against the sky like the wondrous rendering in a Japanese print. And all the while, at intervals, the auerhahn's ghostly shrieking made a sinister tumult in the woods.

Suddenly they saw him. Miss Erith touched Mc-

Kay and pointed cautiously. There, on a partly naked tree-top, was a huge, crouching mass—an enormous bird, pumping its head at every uttered cry and spreading a big fan-like tail and beating the air with stiff-curved drooping wings.

McKay whispered: "I'll try to shoot straight because you're hungry, Yellow-hair"; and all the while his pistol-arm slanted higher and higher. For a second, it remained motionless; then a red streak split the darkness and the pistol-shot crashed in her ears.

There came another sound, too—a thunderous flapping and thrashing in the tree-top, the furious battering, falling tumult of broken branches and blindly beating wings, drumming convulsively in descent. Then came a thud; a feathery tattoo on the ground; silence in the woods.

"And so you shall not go hungry, Yellow-hair," said McKay with his nice smile.

They had done a good deal by the middle of the afternoon; they had broiled the big bird, dined luxuriously, had stored the remainder in their packs which they were preparing to carry with them into the forbidden forest of Les Errues.

There was only one way and that lay over the white shoulder of Thusis—a *cul-de-sac,* according to all guide-books, and terminating in a rest-hut near a cave glistening with icy stalagmites called Thusis's Hair.

Beyond this there was nothing—no path, no progress possible—only a depthless gulf unbridged and the world of mountains beyond.

There was no way; yet, the time before, McKay had passed over the white shoulder of Thusis and had penetrated the forbidden land—had slid into it sideways, somewhere from Thusis's shoulder, on a fragment of tiny avalanche. So there was a way!

"I don't know how it happened, Yellow-hair," he was explaining as he adjusted and buckled her pack for her, "and whether I slid north or east I never exactly knew. But if there's a path into Les Errues except through the Hun wire, it must lie somewhere below Thusis. Because, unless such a path exists, except for that guarded strip lying between the Boche wire and the Swiss, only a winged thing could reach Les Errues across these mountains."

The girl said coolly: "Could you perhaps lower me into it?"

A slight flush stained his cheek-bones: "That would be my *rôle,* not yours. But there isn't rope enough in the Alps to reach Les Errues."

He was strapping the pigeon-cage to his pack as he spoke. Now he hoisted and adjusted it, and stood looking across at the mountains for a moment. Miss Erith's gaze followed him.

Thusis wore a delicate camouflage of mist. And there were other bad signs to corroborate her virgin warning: distant mountains had turned dark blue and seemed pasted in silhouettes against the silvery blue sky. Also the winds had become prophetic, blowing out of the valleys and *up* the slopes.

All that morning McKay's thermometer had been rising and his barometer had fallen steadily; haze had thickened on the mountains; and, it being the

season for the *Föhn* to blow, McKay had expected that characteristic warm gale from the south to bring the violent rain which always is to be expected at that season.

But the *Föhn* did not materialise; in the walnut and chestnut forest around them not a leaf stirred; and gradually the mountains cleared, became inartistically distinct, and turned a beautiful but disturbing dark-blue colour. And Thusis wore her vestal veil in the full sun of noon.

"You know, Yellow-hair," he said, "all these signs are as plain as printed notices. There's bad weather coming. The wind was south; now it's west. I'll bet the mountain cattle are leaving the upper pastures."

He adjusted his binoculars; south of Mount Terrible on another height there were *alms;* and he could see the cattle descending.

He saw something else, too, in the sky and level with his levelled lenses—something like a bird steering toward him through the whitish blue sky.

Still keeping it in his field of vision he spoke quietly: "There's an airplane headed this way. Step under cover, please."

The girl moved up under the trees beside him and unslung her glasses. Presently she also picked up the oncomer.

"Boche, Kay?"

"I don't know. A monoplane. A Boche chaser, I think. Yes. . . . Do you see the cross? What insolence! What characteristic contempt for a weaker people! Look at his signal! Do you see? Look

at those smoke-balls and ribbons! See him soaring there like a condor looking for a way among these precipices."

The Hun hung low above them in mid-air, slowly wheeling over the gulf. Perhaps it was his shadow or the roar of his engines that routed out the lämmergeier, for the unclean bird took the air on enormous pinions, beating his way upward till he towered yelping above the Boche, and their combined clamour came distinctly to the two watchers below.

Suddenly the Boche fired at the other winged thing; the enraged and bewildered bird sheered away in flight and the Hun followed.

"That's why he shot," said McKay. "He's got a pilot, now."

Eagle and plane swept by almost level with the forest where they stood staining with their shadows the white shoulder of Thusis.

Down into the gorge the great geier twisted; after him sped the airplane, banking steeply in full chase. Both disappeared where the flawless elbow of Thusis turns. Then, all alone, up out of the gulf soared the plane.

"The Hun has discovered a landing-place in Les Errues," said McKay. "Watch him."

"There's another Hun somewhere along the shoulder of Thusis," said McKay. "They're exchanging signals. See how the plane circles like a patient hawk. He's waiting for something. What's he waiting for, I wonder?"

For ten minutes the airplane circled leisurely over Thusis. Then whatever the aviator was waiting for

evidently happened, for he shut off his engine; came down in graceful spirals; straightened out; glided through the canyon and reappeared no more to the watchers in the forest of Thusis.

"Now," remarked McKay coolly, "we know where we ought to go. Are you ready, Yellow-hair?"

They had been walking for ten minutes when Miss Erith spoke in an ordinary tone of voice: "Kay? Do you think we're likely to come out of this?"

"No," he said, not looking at her.

"But we'll get our information, you think?"

"Yes."

The girl fell a few paces behind him and looked up at the pigeons where they sat in their light lattice cage crowning his pack.

"Please do your bit, little birds," she murmured to herself.

And, with a smile at them and a nod of confidence, she stepped forward again and fell into the rhythm of his stride.

Very far away to the west they heard thunder stirring behind Mount Terrible.

It was late in the afternoon when he halted near the eastern edges of Thusis's Forest.

"Yellow-hair," he said very quietly, "I've led you into a trap, I'm afraid. Look back. We've been followed!"

She turned. Through the trees, against an inky sky veined with lightning, three men came out upon the further edge of the hog-back which they had traversed a few minutes before, and seated themselves

there in the shelter of the crag. All three carried shotguns.

"Yellow-hair?"

"Yes, Kay."

"You understand what that means?"

"Yes."

"Slip off your pack."

She disengaged her supple shoulders from the load and he also slipped off his pack and leaned it against a tree.

"Now," he said, "you have two pistols and plenty of ammunition. I want you to hold that hog-back. Not a man must cross."

However, the three men betrayed no inclination to cross. They sat huddled in a row sheltered from the oncoming storm by a great ledge of rock. But they held their shotguns poised and ready for action.

The girl crept toward a big walnut tree and, lying flat on her stomach behind it, drew both pistols and looked around at McKay. She was smiling.

His heart was in his throat as he nodded approval. He turned and went rapidly eastward. Two minutes later he came running back, exchanged a signal of caution with Miss Erith, and looked intently at the three men under the ledge. It was now raining.

He drew from his breast a little book and on the thin glazed paper of one leaf he wrote, with waterproof ink, the place and date. And began his message:

"United States Army Int. Dept. No. 76 and No. 77 are trapped on the northwest edge of the wood of

Les Errues which lies under the elbow of Mount Thusis. From this plateau we had hoped to overlook that section of the Hun frontier in which is taking place that occult operation known as 'The Great Secret,' and which we suspect is a gigantic engineering project begun fifty years ago for the purpose of piercing Swiss territory with an enormous tunnel under Mount Terrible, giving the Hun armies a road into France *behind* the French battle-line and *behind* Verdun.

"Unfortunately we are now trapped and our retreat is cut off. It is unlikely that we shall be able to verify our suspicions concerning the Great Secret. But we shall not be taken alive.

"We have, however, already discovered certain elements intimately connected with the Great Secret.

"No. 1. Papers taken from a dead enemy show that the region called Les Errues has been ceded to the Hun in a secret pact as the price that Switzerland pays for immunity from the Boche invasion.

"2nd. The Swiss people are ignorant of this.

"3rd. The Boche guards all approaches to Les Errues. Except by way of the Boche frontier there appears to be only one entrance to Les Errues. We have just discovered it. The path is as follows: From Delle over the Swiss wire to the Crucifix on Mount Terrible; from there east-by-north along the chestnut woods to the shoulder of Mount Thusis. From thence, north over hog-backs 1, 2, and 3 to the Forest of Thusis where we are now trapped.

"Northeast of the forest lies a level, treeless tableland half a mile in diameter called The Garden of Thusis. *A Boche airplane landed there about three hours ago.*

"To reach the Forbidden Forest the aviators, leaving their machine in the Garden of Thusis, walked southwest into the woods where we now are. These woods end in a vast gulf to the north which

separates them from the Forbidden Forest of Les Errues.

"*But a cable crosses!*

"That is the way they went; a tiny car holding two is swung under this cable and the passengers pull themselves to and fro across the enormous chasm.

"At the west end of this cable is a hut; in the hut is the machinery—a drum which can be manipulated so that the cable can be loosened and permitted to sag.

"The reason for dropping the cable is analogous to the reason for using drawbridges over navigable streams; there is only one landing-place for airplanes in this entire region and that is the level, grassy plateau northeast of Thusis Woods. It is so entirely ringed with snow-peaks that there is only one way to approach it for a landing, and that is through the canyon edging Thusis Woods. Now the wire cable blocks this canyon. An approaching airplane therefore hangs aloft and signals to the cable-guards, who lower the cable until it sags sufficiently to free the aerial passage-way between the cliffs. Then the aviator planes down, sweeps through the canyon, and alights on the plateau called Thusis's Garden. But now he must return; the cable must be lifted and stretched taut; and he must embark across the gulf in the little car which runs on grooved wheels to Les Errues.

"This is all we are likely to learn. Our retreat is cut off. Two cable-guards are in front of us; in front of them the chasm; and across the chasm lies Les Errues whither the aviator has gone and where, I do not doubt, are plenty more of his kind.

"This, and two carbons, I shall endeavour to send by pigeon. In extremity we shall destroy all our papers and identification cards and get what Huns we can, *reserving for our own uses* one cartridge apiece.

"(Signed) Nos. 76 AND 77."

It was raining furiously, but the heavy foliage of chestnut and walnut had kept his paper dry. Now in the storm-gloom of the woods lit up by the infernal glare of lightning he detached the long scroll of thin paper covered by microscopical writing and, taking off the rubber bands which confined one of the homing pigeons, attached the paper cylinder securely.

Then he crawled over with his bird and, lying flat alongside of Miss Erith, told her what he had discovered and what he had done about it. The roar of the rain almost obliterated his voice and he had to place his lips close to her ear.

For a long while they lay there waiting for the rain to slacken before he launched the bird. The men across the hog-back never stirred. Nobody approached from the rear. At last, behind Mount Terrible, the tall edges of the rain veil came sweeping out in ragged majesty. Vapours were ascending in its wake; a distant peak grew visible, and suddenly brightened, struck at the summit by a shaft of sunshine.

"Now!" breathed McKay. The homing pigeon, released, walked nervously out over the wet leaves on the forest floor, and, at a slight motion from the girl, rose into flight. Then, as it appeared above the trees, there came the cracking report of a shotgun, and they saw the bird collapse in mid-air and sheer downward across the hog-back. But it did not land there; the marksman had not calculated on those erratic gales from the chasm; and the dead pigeon went whirling down into the viewless gulf amid flying vapours mounting from unseen depths.

Miss Erith and McKay lay very still. The Hunnish marksman across the hog-back remained erect for a few moments like a man at the traps awaiting another bird. After awhile he coolly seated himself again under the dripping ledge.

"The swine!" said McKay calmly. He added: "Don't let them cross." And he rose and walked swiftly back toward the northern edge of the forest.

From behind a tree he could see two Hun cable-guards, made alert by the shot, standing outside their hut where the cable-machinery was housed.

Evidently the echoes of that shot, racketing and rebounding from rock and ravine, had misled them, for they had their backs turned and were gazing eastward, rifles pointed.

Without time for thought or hesitation, McKay ran out toward them across the deep, wet moss. One of them heard him too late and McKay's impact hurled him into the gulf. Then McKay turned and sprang on the other, and for a minute it was a fight of tigers there on the cable platform until the battered visage of the Boche split with a scream and a crashing blow from McKay's pistol-butt drove him over the platform's splintered edge.

And now, panting, bloody, dishevelled, he strained his ears, listening for a shot from the hog-back. The woods were very silent in their new bath of sunshine. A little Alpine bird was singing; no other sound broke the silence save the mellow, dripping noise from a million rain-drenched leaves.

McKay cast a rapid, uneasy glance across the chasm. Then he went into the cable hut.

There were six rifles there in a rack, six wooden bunks, and clothing on pegs—not military uniforms but the garments of Swiss mountaineers.

Like the three men across the hog-back, and the two whom he had so swiftly slain, the Hun cable-patrol evidently fought shy of the Boche uniform here on the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

Two of the cable-guard lay smashed to a pulp thousands of feet below. Where was the remainder of the patrol? Were the men with the shotguns part of it?

McKay stood alone in the silent hut, still breathless from his struggle, striving to think what was now best to do.

And, as he stood there, through the front window of the hut he saw an aviator and another man come down from the crest of Thusis to the chasm's edge, jump into the car which swung under the cable, and begin to pull themselves across toward the hut where he was standing.

The hut screened his retreat to the wood's edge. From there he saw the aviator and his companion land on the platform; heard them shouting for the dead who never would answer from their Alpine deeps; saw the airman at last go away toward the plateau where he had left his machine; heard the clanking of machinery in the hut; saw the steel cable begin to sag into the canyon; *and realised that the aviator was going back over France to the Boche trenches from whence he had arrived.*

In a flash it came to McKay what he should try to do—what he *must* do for his country, for the life of

the young girl, his comrade, for his own life: The watchers at the hog-back must never signal to that airman news of his presence in the Forbidden Forest!

The clanking of the cog-wheels made his steps inaudible to the man who was manipulating the machinery in the hut as he entered and shot him dead. It was rather sickening, for the fellow pitched forward into the machinery and one arm became entangled there.

But McKay, white of cheek and lip and fighting off a deathly nausea, checked the machinery and kicked the carrion clear. Then he set the drum and threw on the lever which reversed the cog-wheels. Slowly the sagging cable began to tighten up once more.

He had been standing there for half an hour or more in an agony of suspense, listening for any shot from the forest behind him, straining eyes and ears for any sign of the airplane.

And suddenly he heard it coming—a resonant rumour through the canyon, nearer, louder, swelling to a roar as the monoplane dashed into view and struck the cable with a terrific crash.

For a second, like a giant wasp suddenly entangled in a spider's strand, it whirled around the cable with a deafening roar of propellers; then a sheet of fire enveloped it; both wings broke off and fell; other fragments dropped blazing; and then the thing itself let go and shot headlong into awful depths!

Above it the taut cable vibrated and sang weirdly in the silence of the chasm.

The girl was still lying flat under the walnut-tree when McKay came back.

Without speaking he knelt, levelled his pistol and fired across at the man beyond the hog-back.

Instantly her pistol flashed, too; one of the men fell and tried to get up in a blind sort of way, and his comrades caught him by the arms and dragged him back behind the ledge.

"All right!" shouted one of the men from his cover, "we've plently of time to deal with you Yankee swine! Stay there and rot!"

"That was Skelton's voice," whispered Miss Erith with an involuntary shudder.

"They'll never attempt that hog-back under our pistols now," said McKay coolly. "Come, Yellow-hair; we're going forward."

"How?" she asked, bewildered.

"By cable, little comrade," he said, with a shaky gaiety that betrayed the tension of his nerves. "So pack up and route-step once more!"

He turned and looked at her and his face twitched:

"You wonderful girl," he said, "you beautiful, wonderful girl! We'll live to fly our pigeons yet, Yellow-hair, under the very snout of the whole Hun empire!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE LATE SIR W. BLINT

THAT two spies, a man and a woman, had penetrated the forest of Les Errues was known in Berlin on the 13th. Within an hour the entire machinery of the German Empire had been set in motion to entrap and annihilate these two people.

The formula distributed to all operators in the Intelligence Department throughout Hundom, and wherever Boche spies had filtered into civilised lands, was this:

"Two enemy secret agents have succeeded in penetrating the forest of Les Errues. One is a man, the other a woman.

"Both are Americans. The man is that civilian prisoner, Kay McKay, who escaped from Holzminden, and of whom an exact description is available.

"The woman is Evelyn Erith. Exact information concerning her is also available.

"The situation is one of extremest delicacy and peril. Exposure of the secret understanding with a certain neutral Power which permits us certain temporary rights within an integral portion of its territory would be disastrous, and would undoubtedly result in an immediate invasion of this neutral (sic) *country by the enemy as well as by our own forces.*

"This must not happen. Yet it is vitally impera-

tive that these two enemy agents should be discovered, seized, and destroyed.

"Their presence in the forest of Les Errues is the most serious menace to the Fatherland that has yet confronted it.

"Upon the apprehension and destruction of these two spies depends the safety of Germany and her allies.

"The war can not be won, a victorious German peace can not be imposed upon our enemies, unless these two enemy agents are found and their bodies absolutely destroyed upon the spot along with every particle of personal property discovered upon their persons.

"More than that: the war will be lost, and with it the Fatherland, unless these two spies are seized and destroyed.

"The Great Secret of Germany is in danger.

"To possess themselves of it—for already they suspect its nature—and to expose it not only to the United States Government but to the entire world, is the mission of these two enemy agents.

"If they succeed it would mean the end of the German Empire.

"If our understanding with a certain neutral Power be made public, that also would spell disaster for Germany.

"The situation hangs by a hair, the fate of the world is suspended above the forest of Les Errues."

On the 14th the process of infiltration began. But the Hun invasion of Les Errues was not to be conducted in force, there must be no commotion there, no stirring, no sound, only a silent, stealthy, death-hunt in that shadowy forest—a methodical, patient, thorough preparation to do murder; a swift, noiseless execution.

Also, on the 14th, the northern sky beyond the Swiss wire swarmed with Hun airplanes patrolling the border.

Not that the Great Secret could be discovered from the air; that danger had been foreseen fifty years ago, and half a century's camouflage screened the results of steady, calculating relentless diligence.

But French or British planes might learn of the presence of these enemy agents in the dark forest of Les Errues, and might hang like hawks above it exchanging signals with them.

Therefore the northern sky swarmed with Boche aircraft—cautiously patrolling beyond the Swiss border, and only prepared to risk its violation if Allied planes first set them an example.

But for a week nothing moved in the heavens above Les Errues except an eagle. And that appeared every day, sheering the blue void above the forest, hovering majestically in circles hour after hour and then, at last, toward sundown, setting its sublime course westward, straight into the blinding disk of the declining sun.

The Hun airmen patrolling the border noticed the eagle. After a while, as no Allied plane appeared, time lagged with the Boche, and he came to look for this lone eagle which arrived always at the same hour in the sky above Les Errues, soared there hour after hour, then departed, flapping slowly westward until lost in the flames of sunset.

"As though," remarked one Boche pilot, "the bird were a phoenix which at the close of every day renews its life from its own ashes in the flames."

Another airman said: "It is not a Lämmergeier, is it?"

"It is a Stein-Adler," said a third.

But after a silence a fourth airman spoke, seated before the hangar and studying a wild flower, the petals of which he had been examining with the peculiar interest of a nature-student:

"For ten days I have had nothing more important to watch than that eagle which appears regularly every day above the forest of Les Errues. And I have concluded that the bird is neither a Lämmergeier nor a Stein-Adler."

"Surely," said one young Hun, "it is a German eagle."

"It must be," laughed another, "because it is so methodical and exact. Those are German traits."

The nature-student contemplated the wild blossom which he was now idly twirling between his fingers by its stem.

"It perplexes me," he mused aloud.

The others looked at him; one said: "What perplexes you, Von Dresslin?"

"That bird."

"The eagle?"

"The eagle which comes every day to circle above Les Errues. I, an amateur of ornithology am, perhaps, with all modesty, permitted to call myself?"

"Certainly," said several airmen at once.

Another added: "We all know you to be a naturalist."

"Pardon—a student only, gentlemen. Which is

why, perhaps, I am both interested and perplexed by this eagle we see every day."

"It is a rare species?"

"It is not a familiar one to the Alps."

"This bird, then, is not a German eagle in your opinion, Von Dresslin?"

"What is it? Asiatic? African? Chinese?" asked another.

Von Dresslin's eyebrows became knitted.

"That eagle which we all see every day in the sky above Les Errues," he said slowly, "has a snow-white crest and tail."

Several airmen nodded; one said: "I have noticed that, too, watching the bird through my binoculars."

"I know," continued Von Dresslin slowly, "of only one species of eagle which resembles the bird we all see every day . . . It inhabits North America," he added thoughtfully.

There was a silence, then a very young airman inquired whether Von Dresslin knew of any authentic reports of an American eagle being seen in Europe.

"Authentic? That is somewhat difficult to answer," replied Von Dresslin, with the true caution of a real naturalist. "But I venture to tell you that, once before—nearly a year ago now—I saw an eagle in this same region which had a white crest and tail and was otherwise a shining bronze in colour."

"Where did you see such a bird?"

"High in the air over Mount Terrible." A deep and significant silence fell over the little company. If Count von Dresslin had seen such an eagle over the Swiss peak called Mount Terrible, and had been

near enough to notice the bird's colour, every man there knew what had been the occasion.

For only once had that particular region of Switzerland been violated by their aircraft during the war. It had happened a year ago when Von Dresslin, patrolling the north Swiss border, had discovered a British flyer planing low over Swiss territory in the air-region between Mount Terrible and the forest of Les Errues.

Instantly the Hun, too, crossed the line: and the air-battle was joined above the forest.

Higher, higher, ever higher mounted the two fighting planes until the earth had fallen away two miles below them.

Then, out of the icy void of the upper air-space, now roaring with their engines' clamour, the British plane shot earthward, down, down, rushing to destruction like a shooting-star, and crashed in the forest of Les Errues.

And where it had been, there in mid-air, hung an eagle with a crest as white as the snow on the shining peaks below.

"He seemed suddenly to be there instead of the British plane," said Von Dresslin. "I saw him distinctly—might have shot him with my pistol as he sheered by me, his yellow eyes aflame, balanced on broad wings. So near he swept that his bright fierce eyes flashed level with mine, and for an instant I thought he meant to attack me.

"But he swept past in a single magnificent curve, screaming, then banked swiftly and plunged straight downward in the very path of the British plane."

Nobody spoke. Von Dresslin twirled his flower and looked at it in an absent-minded way.

"From that glimpse, a year ago, I believe I had seen a species of eagle the proper habitat of which is North America," he said.

An airman remarked grimly: "The Yankees are migrating to Europe. Perhaps their eagles are coming too."

"To pick our bones," added another.

And another man said laughingly to Von Dresslin:

"Fritz, did you see in that downfall of the British enemy, and the dramatic appearance of a Yankee eagle in his place, anything significant?"

"By gad," cried another airman, "we had John Bull by his fat throat, and were choking him to death. And now—the Americans!"

"If I dared cross the border and shoot that Yankee eagle to-morrow," began another airman; but they all knew it wouldn't do.

One said: "Do you suppose, Von Dresslin, that the bird we see is the one you saw a year ago?"

"It is possible."

"An American white-headed eagle?"

"I feel quite sure of it."

"Their national bird," said the same airman who had expressed a desire to shoot it.

"How could an American eagle get here?" inquired another man.

"By way of Asia, probably."

"By gad! A long flight!"

Dresslin nodded: "An omen, perhaps, that we may also have to face the Yankee on our Eastern front."

"The swine!" growled several.

Von Dresslin assented absently to the epithet. But his thoughts were busy elsewhere, his mind preoccupied by a theory which, Hunlike, he, for the last ten days, had been slowly, doggedly, methodically developing.

It was this: Assuming that the bird really was an American eagle, the problem presented itself very clearly—from where had it come? This answered itself; it came from America, its habitat.

Which answer, of course, suggested a second problem; *how* did it arrive?

Several theories presented themselves:

1st. The eagle might have reached Asia from Alaska and so made its way westward as far as the Alps of Switzerland.

2nd. It may have escaped from some public European zoological collection.

3rd. It may have been owned privately and, on account of the scarcity of food in Europe, liberated by its owner.

4th. It *might* have been owned by the Englishman whose plane Von Dresslin had destroyed.

And now Von Dresslin was patiently, diligently developing this theory:

If it had been owned by the unknown Englishman whose plane had crashed a year ago in Les Errues forest, then the bird was undoubtedly his mascot, carried with him in his flights, doubtless a tame eagle.

Probably when the plane fell the bird took wing, which accounted for its sudden appearance in mid-air.

Probably, also, it had been taught to follow its

master; and, indeed, had followed in one superb plunge earthward in the wake of a dead man in a stricken plane.

But—*was* this the same bird?

For argument, suppose it was. Then why did it still hang over Les Errues? Affection for a dead master? Only a dog could possibly show such devotion, such constancy. And besides, birds are incapable of affection. They only know where to go for kind treatment and security. And tamed birds, even those species domesticated for centuries, know only one impulse that draws them toward any human protector—the desire for food.

Could this eagle remember for a whole year that the man who lay dead somewhere in the dusky wilderness of Les Errues had once been kind to him and had fed him? And was that why the great bird still haunted the air-heights above the forest? Possibly.

Or was it not more logical to believe that here, suddenly cast upon its own resources, and compelled to employ instincts hitherto uncultivated or forgotten, to satisfy its hunger, this solitary American eagle had found the hunting good? Probably. And, knowing no other region, had remained there, and for the first time, or at least after a long interval of captivity and dependence on man, it had discovered what liberty was and with liberty the necessity to struggle for existence.

An airman, watching Dresslin's thoughtful features, said:

"You never found out who that Englishman was, did you?

"No."

"Did our agents search Les Errues?"

"I suppose so. But I have never heard anything further about that affair," he shrugged; "and I don't believe we ever will until after the war, and until—"

"Until Switzerland belongs to us," said an airman with a light laugh.

Others, listening, looked at one another significantly, smiling the patient, confident and brooding smile of the Hun.

Knaus unwittingly wrote his character and his epitaph:

"Ich kann warten."

The forest of Les Errues was deathly still. Hunters and hunted both were as silent as the wild things that belonged there in those dim woods—as cautious, as stealthy.

A dim greenish twilight veiled their movements, the damp carpet of moss dulled sounds.

Yet the hunted knew that they were hunted, realised that pursuit and search were inevitable; and the hunters, no doubt, guessed that their quarry was alert.

Now on the tenth day since their entrance into Les Errues those two Americans who were being hunted came to a little wooded valley through which a swift stream dashed amid rock and fern, flinging spray over every green leaf that bordered it, filling its clear pools with necklaces of floating bubbles.

McKay slipped his pack from his shoulders and set it against a tree. One of the two carrier pigeons in their cage woke up and ruffled. Looking closely

at the other he discovered it was dead. His heart sank, but he laid the stiff, dead bird behind a tree and said nothing to his companion.

Evelyn Erith now let go of her own pack and, flinging herself on the moss, set her lips to the surface of a brimming pool.

"Careful of this Alpine water!" McKay warned her. But the girl satisfied her thirst before she rose to her knees and looked around at him.

"Are you tired, Yellow-hair?" he asked.

"Yes. . . . Are you, Kay?"

He shook his head and cast a glance around him.

It was beautiful, this little woodland vale with its stream dashing through and its slopes forested with beech and birch—splendid great trees with foliage golden green in the sun.

But it was not the beauty of the scene that preoccupied these two. Always, when ready to halt, their choice of any resting-place depended upon several things more important than beauty.

For one matter the place must afford concealment, and also a water supply. Moreover it must be situated so as to be capable of defence. Also there must be an egress offering a secure line of retreat.

So McKay began to roam about the place, prowling along the slopes and following the stream. Apparently the topography satisfied him; for after a little while he came back to where Miss Erith was lying on the moss, one arm resting across her eyes.

"You *are* tired," he said.

She removed her arm and looked up at him out of those wonderful golden eyes.

"Is it all right for us to remain here, Kay?"

"Yes. You can see for yourself. Anybody coming into this valley must be visible on that ridge to the south. And there's an exit. This brook dashes through it—two vast granite gates that will let us through into the outer forest, where they might as well hunt for two pins as for us."

The girl smiled; her eyes closed. "I'm glad we can rest," she murmured. So McKay went about his duties.

First he removed his pack and hers a hundred yards down stream, through the granite gateway, and placed them just beyond.

Then he came back for Miss Erith. Scarcely awakened as he lifted her, she placed one arm around his neck with the sleepy unconsciousness of a tired child. They had long been on such terms; there was no escaping them in the intimacy of their common isolation and common danger.

He laid her on the moss, well screened by the granite barrier, and beyond range of the brook's rainbow spray. She was already asleep again.

He took off both her shoes, unwound the spiral puttees and gave her bruised little feet a chance to breathe.

He made camp, tested the wind and found it safe to build a fire, set water to simmer, and unpacked the tinned rations. Then he made the two beds side by side, laying down blankets and smoothing away the twigs underneath.

The surviving carrier pigeon was hungry. He

fed it, lifted it still banded from its place, cleaned the cage and set it to dry in a patch of sunshine.

The four automatic pistols he loaded and laid on a shelf in the granite barricade; set ammunition and flashlight beside them.

Then he went to his pack and got his papers and material, and unrolled the map upon which he had been at work since he and Evelyn Erith had entered the enemy's zone of operations.

From time to time as he worked, drawing or making notes, he glanced at the sleeping girl beside him.

Never but once had the word "love" been mentioned between these two.

For a long while, now—almost from the very beginning—he had known that he was in love with this girl; but, after that one day in the garden, he also knew that there was scarcely the remotest chance that he should live to tell her so again, or that she could survive to hear him.

For when they had entered the enemy's zone below Mount Terrible they both realised that there was almost no chance of their returning.

He had lighted his pipe; and now he sat working away at his drawings, making a map of his route as best he could without instruments, and noting with rapid pencil all matters of interest for those upon whose orders he and this girl beside him had penetrated the forbidden forest of Les Errues. This for the slim chance of getting back alive. But he had long believed that, if his pigeons failed him at the crisis, no report would ever be delivered to those who sent him here, either concerning his discoveries

or his fate and the fate of the girl who lay asleep beside him.

An hour later she awoke. He was still bent over his map, and she presently extended one arm and let her hand rest on his knee.

"Do you feel better, Yellow-hair?"

"Yes. Thank you for removing my shoes."

"I suppose you are hungry," he remarked.

"Yes. Are you?"

He smiled: "As usual. I wish to heaven I could run across a roebuck." They both craved something to satisfy the hunger made keen by the Alpine air, and which no concentrated rations could satisfy. McKay seldom ventured to kill any game—merely an auerhahn, a hare or two, a red squirrel—and sometimes he had caught trout in the mountain brooks with his bare hands—the method called "tickling" and only too familiar to Old-World poachers.

"Roebuck," she repeated trying not to speak wistfully.

He nodded: "One crossed the stream below. I saw the tracks in the moss, which was still stirring where the foot had pressed."

"Dare you risk a shot in Les Errues, Kay?"

"I don't think I'd hesitate."

After a silence: "Why don't you rest? You must be dead tired," she said. And he felt a slight pressure of her fingers drawing him.

So he laid aside his work, dropped upon his blanket, and turned on his left side, looking at her.

"You have not yet seen any sign of the place from which you once looked out across the frontier and

saw thousands and thousands of people as busy as a swarm of ants—have you, Kay?"

"I remember this stream and these woods. I can't seem to recollect how far or in which direction I turned after passing this granite gorge."

"Did you go far?"

"I can't recollect," he said. "I'd give my right arm if I could." His worn and anxious visage touched her.

"Don't fret, Kay, dear," she said soothingly. "We'll find it. We'll find out what the Hun is doing. We'll discover what this Great Secret really is. And our pigeons shall tell it to the world."

And, as always, she smiled cheerfully, confidently. He had never heard her whine, had never seen her falter save from sheer physical weariness.

"We'll win through, Yellow-hair," he said, looking steadily into her clear brown-gold eyes.

"Of course. You are so wonderful, Kay."

"That is the most wonderful thing in the world, Evelyn—to hear you tell me such a thing!"

"Don't you know I think so?"

"I can't believe it—after what you know of me——"

"Kay!"

"I'm sorry—but a scar is a scar——"

"There is no scar! Do you hear me! No scar, no stain! Don't you suppose a woman can judge? And I have my own opinion of you, Kay—and it is a perfectly good opinion and suits me."

She smiled, closed her eyes as though closing the discussion, opened them and smiled again at him.

And now, as always, he wondered how this fair young girl could find courage to smile in the very presence of the most dreadful death any living woman could suffer—death from the Hun.

He lay looking at her and she at him, for a while.

In the silence, a dry stick snapped and McKay was on his feet as though it had been the crack of a pistol.

Presently he stooped, and she lifted her pretty head and rested one ear close to his lips:

"It's that roebuck, I think, down stream." Then something happened; her ear touched his mouth—or his lips, forming some word, came into contact with her—so that it was as though he had kissed her and she had responded.

Both recoiled; her face was bright with mounting colour and he seemed scared. Yet both knew it was not a caress; but she feared he thought she had invited one, and he feared she believed he had offered one.

He went about his affair with the theoretical roebuck in silence, picking up one of his pistols, loosening his knife in its sheath; then, without the usual smile or gesture for her, he started off noiselessly over the moss.

And the girl, supporting herself on one arm, her fingers buried in the moss, looked after him while her flushed face cooled.

McKay moved down stream with pistol lifted, scanning the hard-wood ridges on either hand. For even the reddest of roe deer, in the woods, seem to be amazingly invisible unless they move.

The stream dashed through shadow and sun-spot, splashing a sparkling way straight into the wilderness of Les Errues; and along its fern-fringed banks strode McKay with swift, light steps. His eyes, now sharpened by the fight for life—which life had begun to be revealed to him in all its protean aspects, searched the dappled, demi-light ahead, fiercely seeking to pierce any disguise that protective colouration might afford his quarry.

Silver, russet, green and gold, and with the myriad fulvous nuances that the forest undertones lend to its ensembles, these were the patterned tints that met his eye on every side in the subdued gradations of woodland light.

But nothing out of key, nothing either in tone, colour, or shape, betrayed the discreet and searched for discord in the vague and lovely harmony;—no spiked head tossed in sudden fright; no chestnut flank turned too redly in the dim ensemble, no delicate feet in motion disturbed the solemn immobility of tree-trunk and rock. Only the fern fronds quivered where spray rained across them; and the only sounds that stirred were the crystalline clash of icy rapids and the high whisper of the leaves in Les Errues.

And, as he stood motionless, every sense and instinct on edge, his eyes encountered something out of key with this lovely, sombre masterpiece of God. Instantly a still shock responded to the mechanical signal sent to his eyes; the engine of the brain was racing; he stood as immobile as a tree.

Yes, there on the left something was amiss,—

something indistinct in the dusk of heavy foliage—something, the shape of which was not in harmony with the suave design about him woven of its Creator. After a long while he walked slowly toward it.

There was much more of it than he had seen. Its consequences, too, were visible above him where broken branches hung still tufted with bronze leaves which no new buds would ever push from their dead clasp of the sapless stems. And all around him yearling seedlings had pushed up through the charred wreckage. Even where fire had tried to obtain a foothold, and had been withstood by barriers of green and living sap, in burnt spaces where bits of twisted metal lay, tender shoots had pushed out in that eternal promise of resurrection which becomes a fable only upon a printed page.

McKay's business was with the dead. The weather-faded husk lay there amid dry leaves promising some day to harmonise with the scheme of things.

Mice had cleaned the bony cage under the uniform of a British aviator. Mice gnaw the shed antlers of deer. And other bones.

The pockets were full of papers. McKay read some of them. Afterward he took from the bones of the hand two rings, a wrist-watch, a whistle which still hung by a short chain and a round object attached to a metal ring like a sleigh-bell.

There was a hollow just beyond, made once in time of flood by some ancient mountain torrent long dry, and no longer to be feared.

The human wreckage barely held together, but

it was light; and McKay covered it with a foot of deep green moss, and made a cairn above it out of glacial stones from the watercourse. And on the huge beech that tented it he cut a cross with his trench-knife, making the incision deep, so that it glimmered like ivory against the silvery bark of the great tree. Under this sacred symbol he carved:

"Sir W. Blint, Bart."

Below this he cut a deep, white oblong in the bark, and with a coal from the burned airplane he wrote:

"This is the beginning, not the end. This Englishman still carries on!"

He stood at salute for a full minute. Then turned, dropped to his knees, and began another thorough search among the débris and dead leaves.

"Hello, Yellow-hair!"

She had been watching his approach from where she was seated balanced on the stream's edge, with both legs in the water to the knees.

He came up and dropped down beside her on the moss.

"A dead airman in Les Errues," he said quietly, "a Britisher. I put away what remained of him. The Huns may dig him up: some animals do such things."

"Where did you find him, Kay?" she asked quietly.

"A quarter of a mile down-stream. He lay on the west slope. He had fallen clear, but there was not much left of his machine."

"How long has he lain there in this forest?"

"A year—to judge. Also the last entry in his diary bears this out. They got him through the head, and his belt gave way or was not fastened. Anyway he came down stone dead and quite clear of his machine. His name was Blint—Sir W. Blint, Bart. . . . Lie back on the moss and let your bruised feet hang in the pool. . . . Here—this way —rest that yellow head of yours against my knees. . . . Are you snug?"

"Yes."

"Hold out your hands. These were his trinkets."

The girl cupped her hands to receive the rings, watch, the gold whistle in its little gem-set chains, and the sleigh-bell on its bracelet.

She examined them one by one in silence while McKay ran through the pages of the notebook—discoloured pages all warped and stained in their leather binding but written in pencil with print-like distinction.

"Sir W. Blint," murmured McKay, still busy with the notebook. "Can't find what W. stood for."

"That's all there is—just his name and military rank as an aviator: I left the disk where it hung."

The girl placed the trinkets on the moss beside her and looked up into McKay's face.

Both knew they were thinking of the same thing. They wore no disks. Would anybody do for them what McKay had done for the late Sir W. Blint?

McKay bent a little closer over her and looked down into her face. That any living creature should touch this woman in death seemed to him almost

more terrible than her dying. It was terror of that which sometimes haunted him; no other form of fear.

What she read in his eyes is not clear—was not quite clear to her, perhaps. She said under her breath:

"You must not fear for me, Kay. . . . Nothing can really touch me now."

He did not understand what she meant by this immunity—gathering some vague idea that she had spoken in the spiritual sense. And he was only partly right. For when a girl is beginning to give her soul to a man, the process is not wholly spiritual.

As he looked down at her in silence he saw her gaze shift and her eyes fix themselves on something above the tree-tops overhead.

"There's that eagle again," she said, "wheeling up there in the blue."

He looked up; then he turned his sun-dazzled eyes on the pages of the little notebook which he held open in both hands.

"It's amusing reading," he said. "The late Sir W. Blint seems to have been something of a naturalist. Wherever he was stationed the lives of the birds, animals, insects and plants interested him. . . . Everywhere one comes across his pencilled queries and comments concerning such things; here he discovers a moth unfamiliar to him, there a bird he does not recognise. He was a quaint chap——"

McKay's voice ceased but his eyes still followed the pencilled lines of the late Sir W. Blint. And Evelyn Erith, resting her yellow head against his knees, looked up at him.

"For example," resumed McKay, and read aloud from the diary:

"Five days' leave. Blighty. All top hole at home. Walked with Constance in the park.

Pair of thrushes in the spinney. Rookery full. Usual butterflies in unusual numbers. Toward twilight several sphinx moths visited the privet. No net at hand so did not identify any. Pheasants in bad shape. Nobody to keep them down. Must arrange drives while I'm away.

Late at night a barn owl in the chapel belfrey. Saw him and heard him. Constance nervous; omens and that sort, I fancy; but no funk. Rotten deal for her."

"Who was Constance?" asked Miss Erith.

"Evidently his wife. . . . I wish we could get those trinkets to her." His glance shifted back to the pencilled page and presently he read on, aloud:

France again. Headquarters. Same rumour that Fritz has something up his sleeve. Conference. Letter from Constance. Wrote her also.

10th inst.:

Conference. Interesting theory even if slightly incredible. Wrote Constance.

12th inst.:

Another conference. Sir D. Haig. Back to hangar. A nightingale singing, clear and untroubled above the unceasing thunder of the cannonade. Very pretty moth, incognito, came and sat on my sleeve. One of the Noctuidæ, I fancy, but don't know generic or specific names. About eleven o'clock Sir D. Haig. Unexpected honour. Sir D. serene and cheerful. Showed him about. He was much amused at my

eagle. Explained how I had found him as an eaglet some twenty years ago in America and how he sticks to me like a tame jackdaw.

Told Sir D. that I had been taking him in my air flights everywhere and that he adored it, sitting quite solemnly out of harm's way and, if taking to the air for a bit of exercise, always keeping my plane in view and following it to earth.

Showed Sir D. H. all Manitou's tricks. The old chap did me proud. This was the programme:

I.—'Will you cheer for king and country, Manitou?'

Manitou (yelping)—'Houp—gloup—houp!'

I.—'Suppose you were a Hun eagle, Manitou—just a vulgar Boche buzzard?'

Manitou (hanging his head)—'Houp—gloup—houp!'

I.—'But you're not! You're a Yankee eagle! Now give three cheers for Uncle Sam!'

Manitou (head erect)—'Houp—gloup—houp!'

Sir D. convulsed. Ordered a trench-rat for Manitou as usual. While he was discussing it I told Sir D. H. how I could always send Manitou home merely by attaching to his ankle a big whistling-bell of silver.

Explained that Manitou hated it and that I had taught him to fly home when I attached it by arranging that nobody except my wife should ever relieve him of the bell.

It took about two years to teach him where to go for relief.

Sir D. much amused—reluctant to leave. Wrote to Connie later. Bed.

13th inst.:

Summoned by Sir D. H. Conference. Most interesting. Packed up. Off at 5 P.M., taking my eagle, Manitou. Wrote Constance.

14th inst.:

Paris. Yankees everywhere. Very fit. Have noticed no brag so far. Wrote Constance.

20th inst.:

Paris. Yanks, Yanks, Yanks. And 'thanks' rimes. I said so to one of 'em. 'No,' said he, 'Tanks' is the proper rime—British Tanks!' Neat and modest. Wrote Connie.

21st inst.:

Manitou and I are off. Most interesting quest I ever engaged in. Wrote to my wife.

Delle. Manitou and I both very fit. Machine in waiting. Took the air for a look about. Manitou left me a mile up. Evidently likes the Alps. Soared over Mount Terrible whither I dared not venture —yet! Saw no Huns. Back by sundown. Manitou dropped in to dinner—like a thunderbolt from the zenith. Astonishment of Blue Devils on guard. Much curiosity. Manitou a hero. All see in him an omen of American victory. Wrote Connie.

30th inst.:

Shall try 'it' very soon now.

If it's true—God help the Swiss! If not—profound apologies I suppose. Anyway it's got to be cleared up. Manitou enamoured of mountains. Poor devil, it's in his blood I suppose. Takes the air, now, quite independent of me, but I fancy he gets uneasy if I delay, for he comes and circles over the hangar until my machine takes the air. And if it doesn't he comes down to find out why, mad and yelping at me like an irritated goblin.

I saw an Alpine butterfly to-day—one of those Parnassians all white with wings veined a greenish black. Couldn't catch him. Wrote to Connie. Bed.

31st inst.:

In an hour. All ready. It's hard to believe that the Hun has so terrorised the Swiss Government as to force it into such an outrageous concession. Nous verrons.

A perfect day. Everything arranged. Calm and confident. Think much of Constance but no nerves. Early this morning Manitou, who had been persistently hulking at my heels and squealing invitations to take wing with him, became impatient and went up.

I saw him in time and whistled him down; and I told the old chap very plainly that he could come up with me when I was ready or not at all.

He understood and sat on the table sulking, and cocking his silver head at me while I talked to him. That's one thing about Manitou. Except for a wild Canada goose I never before saw a bird who seemed to have the slightest trace of brain. I know, of course, it's not affection that causes him to trail me, answer his whistle, and obey when he doesn't wish to obey. It's training and habit. But I like to pretend that the old chap is a little fond of me.

I'm off in a few minutes. Manitou is aboard. Glorious visibility. Now for Fritz and his occult designs—if there are any.

A little note to Connie—I scarcely know why. Not a nerve. Most happy. Noticed a small butterfly quite unfamiliar to me. No time now to investigate.

Engines! Manitou yelling with excitement. Symptoms of taking wing, but whistle checks insubordination. . . . All ready. Wish Connie were here.

McKay closed the little book, strapped and buckled the cover.

"Exit Sir W. Blint," he said, not flippantly. "I think I should like to have known that man."

The girl, lying there with the golden water swirling around her knees and her golden head on the moss, looked up through the foliage in silence.

The eagle was soaring lower over the forest now. After a little while she reached out and let her fingers touch McKay's hand where it rested on the moss:

"Kay?"

"Yes, Yellow-hair."

"It isn't possible, of course. . . . But are there any eagles in Europe that have white heads and tails?"

"No."

"I know. . . . I wish you'd look up at that eagle. He is not very high."

McKay lifted his head. After a moment he rose to his feet, still looking intently skyward. The eagle was sailing very low now.

"That's an American eagle!"

The words shot out of McKay's lips. The girl sat upright, electrified.

And now the sun struck full across the great bird as he sheered the tree-tops above. *Head and tail were a dazzling white.*

"Could—could it be that dead man's eagle?" said the girl. "Oh, could it be Manitou? *Could* it, Kay?"

McKay looked at her, and his eye fell on the gold whistle hanging from her wrist on its jewelled chain.

"If it is," he said, "he might notice that whistle. Try it!"

She nodded excitedly, set the whistle to her lips

and blew a clear, silvery, penetrating blast upward.

"Kay! Look!" she gasped.

For the response had been instant. Down through the tree-tops sheered the huge bird, the air shrilling through his pinions, and struck the solid ground and set his yellow claws in it, grasping the soil of the Old World with mighty talons. Then he turned his superb head and looked fearlessly upon his two compatriots.

"Manitou! Manitou!" whispered the girl. And crept toward him on her knees, nearer, nearer, until her slim outstretched hand rested on his silver crest.

"Good God!" said McKay in the low tones of reverence.

McKay had drawn a duplicate of his route-map on thin glazed paper.

Evelyn Erith had finished a duplicate copy of his notes and reports.

Of these and the trinkets of the late Sir W. Blint they made two flat packets, leaving one of them unsealed to receive the brief letter which McKay had begun:

"Dear Lady Blint—

It is not necessary to ask the wife of Sir W. Blint to have courage.

He died as he had lived—a fine and fearless British sportsman.

His death was painless. He lies in the forest of Les Errues. I enclose a map for you.

I and my comrade, Evelyn Erith, dare believe that his eagle, Manitou, has not forgotten the air-path to England and to you. With God's guidance he

will carry this letter to you. And with it certain objects belonging to your husband. And also certain papers which I beg you will have safely delivered to the American Ambassador.

If, madam, we come out of this business alive, my comrade and I will do ourselves the honour of waiting on you if, as we suppose, you would care to hear from us how we discovered the body of the late Sir W. Blint.

Madam, accept homage and deep respect from two Americans who are, before long, rather likely to join your gallant husband in the great adventure."

"Yellow-hair?"

She came, signed the letter. Then McKay signed it, and it was enclosed in one of the packets.

Then McKay took the dead carrier pigeon from the cage and tossed it on the moss. And Manitou planted his terrible talons on the inert mass of feathers and tore it to shreds.

Evelyn attached the anklet and whistling bell; then she unwound a yard of surgeon's plaster, and kneeling, spread the eagle's enormous pinions, holding them horizontal while McKay placed the two packets and bound them in place under the outstretched wings.

The big bird had bolted the pigeon. At first he submitted with sulky grace, not liking what was happening, but offering no violence.

And even now, as they backed away from him, he stood in dignified submission, patiently striving to adjust his closed wings to these annoying though light burdens which seemed to have no place among his bronze feathers.

Presently, irritated, the bird partially unclosed one wing as though to probe with his beak for the seat of his discomfort. At the same time he moved his foot, and the bell rattled on his anklet.

Instantly his aspect changed; stooping he inspected the bell, struck it lightly with his beak as though in recognition.

Was it the hated whistling bell? Again the curved beak touched it. And recognition was complete.

Mad all through, disgust, indecision, gave rapid place to nervous alarm. Every quill rose in wrath; the snowy crest stood upright; the yellow eyes flashed fire.

Then, suddenly, the eagle sprang into the air, yelping fierce protest against such treatment: the shrilling of the bell swept like a thin gale through the forest, keener, louder, as the enraged bird climbed the air, mounting, mounting into the dazzling blue above until the motionless watchers in the woods below saw him wheel.

Which way would he turn? Round and round swept the eagle in wider and more splendid circles; in tensest suspense the two below watched motionless.

Then the tension broke; and a dry sob escaped the girl.

For the eagle had set his lofty course at last. Westward he bore through pathless voids uncharted save by God alone—who has set His signs to mark those high blue lanes, lest the birds—His lesser children—should lose their way betwixt earth and moon.

CHAPTER IX

THE BLINDER TRAIL

THERE was no escape that way. From the northern and eastern edges of the forest sheer cliffs fell away into bluish depths where forests looked like lawns and the low uplands of the Alsatian border resembled hillocks made by tunnelling moles. And yet it was from somewhere not far away that a man once had been carried safely into Alsace on a sudden snowslide. That man now lay among the trees on the crag's edge looking down into the terrific chasm below. He and the girl who crouched in the thicket of alpine roses behind him seemed a part of the light-flecked forest—so inconspicuous were they among dead leaves and trees in their ragged and weather-faded clothing.

They were lean from physical effort and from limited nourishment. The skin on their faces and hands, once sanguine and deeply burnt by Alpine wind and sun and snow glare, now had become almost colourless, so subtly the alchemy of the open operates on those whose only bed is last year's leaves and whose only shelter is the sky. Even the girl's yellow hair had lost its sunny brilliancy, so that now it seemed merely a misty part of the lovely, subdued harmony of the woods.

The man, still searching the depths below with straining, patient gaze, said across his shoulder:

"It was here somewhere—near here, Yellow-hair, that I went over, and found what I found. . . . But it's not difficult to guess what you and I should find if we try to go over now."

"Death?" she motioned with serene lips.

He had turned to look at her, and he read her lips.

"And yet," he said, "we must manage to get down there, somehow or other, alive."

She nodded. Both knew that, once down there, they could not expect to come out alive. That was tacitly understood. All that could be hoped was that they might reach those bluish depths alive, live long enough to learn what they had come to learn, release the pigeon with its message, then meet destiny in whatever guise it confronted them.

For Fate was not far off. Fate already watched them—herself unseen. She had caught sight of them amid the dusk of the ancient trees—was following them, stealthily, murderously, through the dim aisles of this haunted forest of Les Errues.

These two were the hunted ones, and their hunters were in the forest—nearer now than ever because the woodland was narrowing toward the east.

Also, for the first time since they had entered the Forbidden Forest, scarcely noticeable paths appeared flattening the carpet of dead leaves—not trails made by game—but ways trodden at long intervals by man—trails unused perhaps for months

—then rendered vaguely visible once more by the unseen, unheard feet of lightly treading foes.

Here for the first time they had come upon the startling spoor of man—of men and enemies—men who were hunting them to slay them, and who now, in these eastern woods, no longer cared for the concealment that might lull to a sense of false security the human quarry that they pursued.

And yet the Hun-pack hunting them though the forbidden forest of Les Errues had, in their new indifference to their quarry's alarm, and in the ferocity of their growing boldness, offered the two fugitives a new hope and a new reason for courage: —the grim courage of those who are about to die, and who know it, and still carry on.

For this is what the Huns had done—not daring to use signals visible to the Swiss patrols on nearer mountain flanks.

Nailed to a tree beside the scarcely visible trail of flattened leaves—a trail more imagined and feared than actually visible—was a sheet of white paper. And on it was written in the tongue of the Hun,—and in that same barbarous script also—a message, the free translation of which was as follows:

"WARNING!"

The three Americans recently sent into Les Errues by the Military Intelligence Department of the United States Army now fighting in France are still at large somewhere in this forest. Two of them are operating together, the well-known escaped prisoner, Kay McKay, and the woman secret-agent, Evelyn Erith. The third American, Alexander Gray, has

been wounded in the left hand by one of our riflemen, but managed to escape, and is now believed to be attempting to find and join the agents McKay and Erith.

This must be prevented. All German agents now operating in Les Errues are formally instructed to track down and destroy without traces these three spies whenever and wherever encountered according to plan. It is expressly forbidden to attempt to take any one or all of these spies alive. No prisoners! No traces! Germans, do your duty! The Fatherland is in peril!

(Signed) "HOCHSTIM."

McKay wriggled cautiously backward from the chasm's granite edge and crawled into the thicket of alpine roses where Evelyn Erith lay.

"No way out, Kay?" she asked under her breath.

"No way *that* way, Yellow-hair."

"Then?"

"I don't—know," he said slowly.

"You mean that we ought to turn back."

"Yes, we ought to. The forest is narrowing very dangerously for us. It runs to a point five miles farther east, overlooking impassable gulfs. . . . We should be in a *cul-de-sac,* Yellow-hair."

"I know."

He mused for a few moments, cool, clear-eyed, apparently quite undisturbed by their present peril and intent only on the mission which had brought them here, and how to execute it before their unseen trackers executed them.

"To turn now, and attempt to go back along this precipice, is to face every probability of meeting the

men we have so far managed to avoid," he said aloud in his pleasant voice, but as though presenting the facts to himself alone.

"Of course we shall account for some of the Huns; but that does not help us to win through. . . . Even an exchange of shots would no doubt be disastrous to our plans. We *must* keep away from them. . . . Otherwise we could never hope to creep into the valley alive. . . . Tell me, Yellow-hair, have you thought of anything new?"

The girl shook her head.

"No, Kay. . . . Except that chance of running across this new man of whom we never had heard before the stupid Boche advertised his presence in Les Errues."

"Alexander Gray," nodded McKay, taking from his pocket the paper which the Huns had nailed to the great pine, and unfolding it again.

The girl rested her chin on his shoulder to re-read it—an apparent familiarity which he did not misunderstand. The dog that believes in you does it—from perplexity sometimes, sometimes from loneliness. Or, even when afraid—not fearing with the baser emotion of the poltroon, but afraid with that brave fear which is a wisdom too, and which feeds and brightens the steady flame of courage.

"Alexander Gray," repeated McKay. "I never supposed that we would send another man in here—at least not until something had been heard concerning our success or failure. . . . I had understood that such a policy was not advisable. You know yourself, Yellow-hair, that the fewer people we

have here the better the chance. And it was so decided before we left New York. . . . And—I wonder what occurred to alter our policy."

"Perhaps the Boches have spread reports of our capture by Swiss authorities," she said simply.

"That might be. Yes, and the Hun newspapers might even have printed it. I can see their scareheads: 'Gross Violation of Neutral Soil!

"'Switzerland invaded by the Yankees! Their treacherous and impudent spies caught in the Alps!' —that sort of thing. Yes, it might be that . . . and yet——"

"You think the Boche would not call attention to such an attempt even to trap others of our agents for the mere pleasure of murdering them?"

"That's what I think, Eve."

He called her "Eve" only when circumstances had become gravely threatening. At other times it was usually "Yellow-hair!"

"Then you believe that this man, Gray, has been sent into Les Errues to aid us to carry on independently the operation in which we have so far failed?"

"I begin to think so." The girl's golden eyes became lost in retrospection.

"And yet," she ventured after a few moments' thought, "he must have come into Les Errues learning that we also had entered it; and apparently he has made no effort to find us."

"We can't know that, Eve."

"He must be a woodsman," she argued, "and also he must suppose that we are more or less familiar with American woodcraft, and fairly well versed in

its signs. Yet—he has left no sign that we could understand where a Hun could not."

"Because we have discovered no sign we can not be certain that this man Gray has made none for us to read," said McKay.

"No. . . . And yet he has left nothing that we have discovered—no blaze; no moss or leaf, no stone or cairn—not a broken twig, not a peeled stick, and no trail!"

"How do we know that the traces of a trail marked by flattened leaves might not be his trail? Once, on that little sheet of sand left by rain in the torrent's wake, you found the imprint of a hob-nailed shoe such as the Hun hunters wear," she reminded him. "And there we first saw the flattened trail of last year's leaves—if indeed it be truly a trail."

"But, Eve dear, never have we discovered in any dead and flattened leaf the imprint of hobnails,—let alone the imprint of a human foot."

"Suppose, whoever made that path, had pulled over his shoes a heavy woolen sock." He nodded.

"I feel, somehow, that the Hun flattened out those leaves," she went on. "I am sure that had an American made the trail he would also have contrived to let us know—given us some indication of his identity."

The girl's low voice suddenly failed and her hand clutched McKay's shoulder.

They lay among the alpine roses like two stones, never stirring, the dappled sunlight falling over them as harmoniously and with no more and no

less accent than it spotted tree-trunk and rock and moss around them.

And, as they lay there, motionless, her head resting on his thigh, a man came out of the dimmer woods into the white sunshine that flooded the verge of the granite chasm.

The man was very much weather-beaten; his tweeds were torn; he carried a rifle in his right hand. And his left was bound in bloody rags. But what instantly arrested McKay's attention was the pack strapped to his back and supported by a "tump-line."

Never before had McKay seen such a pack carried in such a manner excepting only in American forests.

The man stood facing the sun. His visage was burnt brick colour, a hue which seemed to accentuate the intense blue of his eyes and make his light-coloured hair seem almost white.

He appeared to be a man of thirty, superbly built, with a light, springy step, despite his ragged and weary appearance.

McKay's eyes were fastened desperately upon him, upon the strap of the Indian basket which crossed his sun-scorched forehead, upon his crystal-blue eyes of a hunter, upon his wounded left hand, upon the sinewy red fist that grasped a rifle, the make of which McKay should have known, and did know. For it was a Winchester 45-70—no chance for mistaking that typical American weapon. And McKay fell a-trembling in every limb.

Presently the man cautiously turned, scanned his

back trail with that slow-stirrng wariness of a woodsman who never moves abruptly or without good reason; then he went back a little way, making no sound on the forest floor.

And McKay saw that he wore knee moccasins.

At the same time Evelyn Erith drew her little length noiselessly along his, and he felt her mouth warm against his ear:

"Gray?" He nodded.

"I think so, too. His left hand is injured. He wears American moccasins. But in God's name be careful, Kay. It may be a trap."

He nodded almost imperceptibly, keeping his eyes on the figure which now stood within the shade of the trees in an attitude which might suggest listening, or perhaps merely a posture of alert repose.

Evelyn's mouth still rested against his ear and her light breath fell warmly on him. Then presently her lips moved again:

"Kay! He *looks* safe."

McKay turned his head with infinite caution and she inclined hers to his lips:

"I think it is Gray. But we've got to be certain, Eve." She nodded.

"He *does* look right," whispered McKay. "No Boche cradles a rifle in the hollow of his left arm so naturally. It is *habit,* because he does it in spite of a crippled left hand."

She nodded again.

"Also," whispered McKay, "everything else about him is convincing—the pack, tump-line, moccasins, Winchester: and his manner of moving. . . . I

know deer-stalkers in Scotland and in the Alps. I know the hunters of ibex and chamois, of roe-deer and red stag, of auerhahn and eagle. This man is *different.* He moves and behaves like our own woodsmen—like one of our own hunters."

She asked with dumb lips touching his ear: "Shall we chance it?"

"No. It must be a certainty."

"Yes. We must not offer him a chance."

"Not a ghost of a chance to do us harm," nodded McKay. "Listen attentively, Eve; when he moves on, rise when I do; take the pigeon and the little sack because I want both hands free. Do you understand, dear?"

"Yes."

"Because I shall have to kill him if the faintest hint of suspicion arises in my mind. It's got to be that way, Eve."

"Yes, I know."

"Not for our own safety, but for what our safety involves," he added.

She inclined her head in acquiescence.

Very slowly and with infinite caution McKay drew from their holsters beneath his armpits two automatic pistols.

"Help me, Eve," he whispered.

So she aided him where he lay beside her to slip the pack straps over his shoulders. Then she drew toward her the little osier cage in which their only remaining carrier-pigeon rested secured by elastic bands, grasped the smaller sack with the other hand, and waited.

They had waited an hour and more; and the figure of the stranger had moved only once—shifted merely to adjust itself against a supporting tree-trunk and slip the tump-line.

But now the man was stirring again, cautiously resuming the forehead-straps.

Ready, now, to proceed in whichever direction he might believe lay his destination, the strange man took the rifle into the hollow of his left arm once more, remained absolutely motionless for five full minutes, then, stirring stealthily, his moccasins making no sound, he moved into the forest in a half-crouching attitude.

And after him went McKay with Evelyn Erith at his elbow, his sinister pistols poised, his eyes fixed on the figure which passed like a shadow through the dim forest light ahead.

Toward mid-afternoon their opportunity approached; for here was the first water they had encountered—and the afternoon had become burning hot—and their own throats were cracking with that fierce thirst of high places where, even in the summer air, there is that thirst-provoking hint of ice and snow.

For a moment, however, McKay feared that the man meant to go on, leaving the thin, icy rivulet untasted among its rocks and mosses; for he crossed the course of the little stream at right angles, leaping lithely from one rock to the next and travelling upstream on the farther bank.

Then suddenly he stopped stock-still and looked back along his trail—nearly blind save for a few

patches of flattened dead leaves which his moccasined tread had patted smooth in the shadier stretches where moisture lingered undried by the searching rays of the sun.

For a few moments the unknown man searched his own back-trail, standing as motionless as the trunk of a lichened beech-tree. Then, very slowly, he knelt on the dead leaves, let go his pack, and, keeping his rifle in his right hand, stretched out his sinewy length above the pool on the edge of which he had halted.

Twice, before drinking, he lifted his head to sweep the woods around him, his parched lips still dry. Then, with the abruptness—not of man but of some wild thing—he plunged his sweating face into the pool.

And McKay covered him where he lay, and spoke in a voice which stiffened the drinking man to a statue prone on its face:

"I've got you right! Don't lift your head! You'll understand me if you're American!"

The man lay as though dead. McKay came nearer; Evelyn Erith was at his elbow.

"Take his rifle, Eve."

The girl walked over and coolly picked up the Winchester.

"Now cover him!" continued McKay. "Find a good rest for your gun and keep him covered, Eve."

She laid the rifle level across a low branch, drew the stock snug and laid her cheek to it and her steady finger on the trigger.

"When I say 'squeeze,' let him have it! Do you understand, Eve?"

"Perfectly."

Then, with one pistol poised for a drop shot, McKay stepped forward and jerked open the man's pack. And the man neither stirred nor spoke. For a few minutes McKay remained busy with the pack, turning out packets of concentrated rations of American manufacture, bits of personal apparel, a meagre company outfit, spare ammunition—the dozen-odd essentials to be always found in an American hunter's pack.

Then McKay spoke again:

"Eve, keep him covered. Shoot when I say shoot."

"Right," she replied calmly. And to the recumbent and unstirring figure McKay gave a brief order:

"Get up! Hands up!"

The man rose as though made of steel springs and lifted both hands.

Water still ran from his chin and lips and sweating cheeks. But McKay, resting the muzzle of his pistol against the man's abdomen, looked into a face that twitched with laughter.

"You think it's funny?" he snarled, but the blessed relief that surged through him made his voice a trifle unsteady.

"Yes," said the man, "it hits me that way."

"Something else may hit you," growled McKay, ready to embrace him with sheer joy.

"Not unless you're a Boche," retorted the man coolly. "But I guess you're Kay McKay——"

"Don't get so damned familiar with names!"

"That's right, too. I'll just call you Seventy-Six, and this young lady Seventy-Seven. . . . And I'm Two Hundred and Thirty."

"What else?"

"My name?"

"Certainly."

"It isn't expected——"

"It is in this case," snapped McKay, wondering at himself for such ultra precaution.

"Oh, if you insist then, I'm Gray. . . . Alec Gray of the States United Army Intelligence Serv——"

"All right. . . . Gad! . . . It's all right, Gray!"

He took the man's lifted right hand, jerked it down and crushed it in a convulsive grasp: "It's good to see you. . . . We're in a hole—deadlocked—no way out but back!" he laughed nervously. "Have you any dope for us?"

Gray's blue eyes travelled smilingly toward Evelyn and rested on the muzzle of the Winchester. And McKay laughed almost tremulously:

"All clear, Yellow-hair! This *is* Gray—God be thanked!"

The girl, pale and quiet and smiling, lowered the rifle and came forward offering her hand.

"It's pleasant to see *you,*" she said quite steadily. "We were afraid of a Boche trick."

"So I notice," said Gray, intensely amused.

Then the weather-tanned faces of all three sobered.

"This is no place to talk things over," said Gray shortly.

"Do you know a better place?"

"Yes. If you'll follow me."

He went to his pack, put it swiftly in order, hoisted it, resumed the tump-line, and looked around at Evelyn for his rifle.

But she had already slung it across her own shoulders and she pointed at his wounded hand and its blood-black bandage and motioned him forward.

The sun hung on the shoulder of a snow-capped alp when at last these three had had their brief understanding concerning one another's identity, credentials, and future policy.

Gray's lair, in a bushy hollow between two immense jutting cakes of granite, lay on the very brink of the chasm. And there they sat, cross-legged in the warmth of the declining sun in gravest conference concerning the future.

"Recklow insisted that I come," repeated Gray. "I was in the 208th Pioneers—in a sawmill near La Roche Rouge—Vosges—when I got my orders."

"And Recklow thinks we're caught and killed?"

"So does everybody in the Intelligence. The Mulhausen paper had it that the Swiss caught you violating the frontier, which meant to Recklow that the Boche had done you in."

"I see," nodded McKay.

"So he picked me."

"And you say you guided in Maine?"

"Yes, when I was younger. After I was on my own I kept store at South Carry, Maine, and ran the guides there."

"I noticed all the ear-marks," nodded McKay.

Gray smiled: "I guess they're there all right if a man knows 'em when he sees 'em."

"Were you badly shot up?"

"Not so bad. They shoot a pea-rifle, single shot all over silver and swallowtail stock——"

"I know," smiled McKay.

"Well, you know them. It drills nasty with a soft bullet, cleaner with a chilled one. My left hand's a wreck but I sha'n't lose it."

"I had better dress it before night," said Evelyn.

"I dressed it at noon. I won't disturb it again to-day," said Gray, thanking her with his eloquent blue eyes.

McKay said: "So you found the place where I once slid off?"

"It's plain enough, windfall and general wreckage mark it."

"You say it's a dozen miles west of here?"

"About."

"That's odd," said McKay thoughtfully. "I had believed I recognised this ravine. But these deep gulfs all look more or less alike. And I saw it only once and then under hair-raising circumstances."

Gray smiled, but Evelyn did not. McKay said: "So that's where they winged you, was it?"

"Yes. I was about to negotiate the slide—you remember the V-shaped slate cleft?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was just starting into that when the rifle cracked and I jumped for a tree with a broken wing and a bad scare."

"You saw the man?"

"I did later. He came over to look for dead game, and I ached to let him go; but it was too risky with Les Errues swarming alive with Boches, and me with the stomach-sickness of a shot-up man. Figure it out, McKay, for yourself."

"Of course, you did the wise thing and the right one."

"I think so. I travelled until I fainted." He turned and glanced around. "Strangely enough I saw black right here!—fell into this hole by accident, and have made it my home since then."

"It was a Godsend," said the girl.

"It was, Miss Erith," said Gray, resting his eloquent eyes on her.

"And you say," continued McKay, "that the Boche are sitting up day and night over that slide?"

"Day and night. The swine seem to know it's the only way out. I go every day, every night. Always the way is blocked; always I discover one or more of their riflemen there in ambush while the rest of the pack are ranging Les Errues."

"And yet," said McKay, "we've *got* to go that way, sooner or later."

There was a silence: then Gray nodded.

"Yes," he said, "but it is a question of waiting."

"There is a moon to-night," observed Evelyn Erith.

McKay lifted his head and looked at her gravely: Gray's blue eyes flashed his admiration of a young girl who quietly proposed to face an unknown precipice at night by moonlight under the rifles of ambushed men.

"After all," said McKay slowly, "is there *any* other way?"

In the silence which ensued Evelyn Erith, who had been lying between them on her stomach, her chin propped up on both hands, suddenly raised herself on one arm to a sitting posture.

Instantly Gray shrank back, white as a sheet, lifting his mutilated hand in its stiffened and bloody rags; and the girl gasped out her agonised apology:

"Oh—*can* you forgive me! It was unspeakable of me!"

"It—it's all right," said Gray, the colour coming back to his face; but the girl in her excitement of self-reproach and contrition begged to be allowed to dress the mutilated hand which her own careless movement had almost crushed.

"Oh, Kay—I set my hand on his wounded fingers and rested my full weight! Oughtn't he to let us dress it again at once?"

But Gray's pluck was adamant, and he forced a laugh, dismissing the matter with another glance at Evelyn out of clear blue eyes that said a little more than that no harm had been done—said, in one frank and deep-flashing look, more than the girl perhaps cared to understand.

The sun slipped behind the rocky flank of a

great alp; a burst of rosy glory spread fan-wise to the zenith.

Against it, tall and straight and powerful, Gray rose and walking slowly to the cliff's edge, looked down into the valley mist now rolling like a vast sea of cloud below them.

And, as he stood there, Evelyn's hand grasped McKay's arm:

"If he touches his rifle, shoot! Quick, Kay!"

McKay's right hand fell into his side-pocket—where one of his automatics lay. He levelled it as he grasped it, hidden within the side-pocket of his coat.

"His hand is not wounded," breathed the girl. "If he touches his rifle he is a Hun!"

McKay's head nodded almost imperceptibly. Gray's back was still turned, but one hand was extended, carelessly reaching for the rifle that stood leaning against the cake of granite.

"Don't touch it!" said McKay in a low but distinct voice: and the words galvanised the extended arm and it shot out, grasping the rifle, as the man himself dropped out of sight behind the rock.

A terrible stillness fell upon the place; there was not a sound, not a movement.

Suddenly the girl pointed at a shadow that moved between the rocks—and the crash of McKay's pistol deafened them.

Then, against the dazzling glory of the west a dark shape staggered up, clutching a wavering rifle, reeling there against the rosy glare an instant; and

the girl turned her sick eyes aside as McKay's pistol spoke again.

Like a shadow cast by hell the black form swayed, quivered, sank away outward into the blinding light that shone across the world.

Presently a tinkling sound came up from the fog-shrouded depths—the falling rifle striking ledge after ledge until the receding sound grew fainter and more distant, and finally was heard no more.

But that was the only sound they heard; for the man himself lay still on the chasm's brink, propped from the depths by a tuft of alpine roses in full bloom, his blue eyes wide open, a blue hole just between them, and his bandaged hand freed from its camouflage, lying palm upward and quite uninjured on the grass!

CHAPTER X

THE GREATER LOVE

AS the blinding lens of the sun glittered level and its first rays poured over tree and rock, a man in the faded field-uniform of a Swiss officer of mountain artillery came out on the misty ledge across the chasm.

"You over there!" he shouted in English. "Here is a Swiss officer to speak with you! Show yourselves!"

Again, after waiting a few moments, he shouted: "Show yourselves or answer. It is a matter of life or death for you both!"

There was no reply to the invitation, no sound from the forest, no movement visible. Thin threads of vapour began to ascend from the tremendous depths of the precipice, steaming upward out of mist-choked gorges where, under thick strata of fog, night still lay dark over unseen Alpine valleys below.

The Swiss officer advanced to the cliff's edge and looked down upon a blank sea of cloud. Presently he turned east and walked cautiously along the rim of the chasm for a hundred yards. Here the gulf narrowed so that the cleft between the jutting crags was scarcely a hundred feet in width. And here

he halted once more and called across in a resonant, penetrating voice:

"Attention, you, over there in the Forest of Les Errues! You had better wake up and listen! Here is a Swiss officer come to speak with you. Show yourselves or answer!"

There came no sound from within the illuminated edges of the woods.

But outside, upon the chasm's sparkling edge, lay a dead man stark and transfigured and stiff as gold in the sun.

And already the first jewelled death-flies zig-zagged over him, lacing the early sunshine with ominous green lightning.

They who had killed this man might not be there behind the sunlit foliage of the forest's edge; but the Swiss officer, after waiting a few moments, called again, loudly. Then he called a third time more loudly still, because into his nostrils had stolen the faint taint of dry wood smoke. And he stood there in silhouette against the rising sun listening, certain, at last, of the hidden presence of those he sought.

Now there came no sound, no stirring behind the forest's sunny edge; but just inside it, in the lee of a huge rock, a young girl in ragged boy's clothing, uncoiled her slender length from her blanket and straightened out flat on her stomach. Her yellow hair made a spot like a patch of sunlight on the dead leaves. Her clear golden eyes were as brilliant as a lizard's.

From his blanket at her side a man, gaunt and ragged and deeply bitten by sun and wind, was pull-

ing an automatic pistol from its holster. The girl set her lips to his ear:

"Don't trust him, for God's sake, Kay," she breathed.

He nodded, felt forward with cautious handgroping toward a damp patch of moss, and drew himself thither, making no sound among the dry leaves.

"Watch the woods behind us, Yellow-hair," he whispered.

The girl fumbled in her tattered pocket and produced a pistol. Then she sat up cross-legged on her blanket, rested one elbow across her knee, and, cocking the poised weapon, swept the southern woods with calm, bright eyes.

Now the man in Swiss uniform called once more across the chasm: "Attention, Americans! I know you are there; I smell your fire. Also, what you have done is plain enough for me to see—that thing lying over there on the edge of the rocks with corpse-flies already whirling over it! And you had better answer me, Kay McKay!"

Then the man in the forest who now was lying flat behind a birch-tree, answered calmly:

"You, in your Swiss uniform of artillery, over there, what do you want of me?"

"So you are there!" cried the Swiss, striving to pierce the foliage with eager eyes. "It is you, is it not, Kay McKay?"

"I've answered, have I not?"

"Are you indeed then that same Kay McKay of the Intelligence Service, United States Army?"

"You appear to think so. I am Kay McKay; that is answer enough for you."

"Your comrade is with you—Evelyn Erith?"

"None of your business," returned McKay, coolly.

"Very well; let it be so then. But that dead man there—why did you kill your American comrade?"

"He was a camouflaged Boche," said McKay contemptously. "And I am very sure that you're another—you there, in your foolish Swiss uniform. So say what you have to say and clear out!"

The officer came close to the edge of the chasm: "I can not expect you to believe me," he said, "and yet I really am what I appear to be, an officer of Swiss Mountain Artillery. If you think I am something else why do you not shoot me?"

McKay was silent. "Nobody would know," said the other. "You can kill me very easily. I should fall into the ravine—down through that lake of cloud below. Nobody would ever find me. Why don't you shoot?"

"I'll shoot when I see fit," retorted McKay in a sombre voice. Presently he added in tones that rang a little yet trembled too—perhaps from physical reasons—"What do you want of a hunted man like me?"

"I want you to leave Swiss territory!"

"Leave!" McKay's laugh was unpleasant. "You know damned well I can't leave with Les Errues woods crawling alive with Huns."

"Will you leave the canton of Les Errues, McKay, if I show you a safe route out?"

And, as the other made no reply: "You have no

right to be here on neutral territory," he added, "and my Government desires you to leave at once!"

"I have as much right here as the Huns have," said McKay in his pleasant voice.

"Exactly. And these Germans have no right here either!"

"That also is true," rejoined McKay gently, "so why has your Government permitted the Hun to occupy the Canton of Les Errues? Oh, don't deny it," he added wearily as the Swiss began to repudiate the accusation; "you've made Les Errues a No-Man's Land, and it's free hunting now! If you're sick of your bargain, send in your mountain troops and turn out the Huns."

"And if I also send an escort and a free conduct for you and your comrade?"

"No."

"You will not be harmed, not even interned. We set you across our wire at Delle. Do you accept?"

"No."

"With every guarantee——"

"You've made this forest a part of the world's battle-field. . . . No, I shall not leave Les Errues!"

"Listen to reason, you insane American! You can not escape those who are closing in on you—those who are filtering the forest for you—who are gradually driving you out into the eastern edges of Les Errues! And what then, when at last you are driven like wild game by a line of beaters to the brink of the eastern cliffs? There is no water there. You will die of thirst. There is no food. What

is there left for you to do with your back to the final precipice?"

McKay laughed a hard, unpleasant laugh: "I certainly shall not tell you what I mean to do," he said. "If this is all you have to say to me you may go!"

There ensued a silence. The Swiss began to pace the opposite cliff, his hands behind him. Finally he halted abruptly and looked across the chasm.

"Why did you come into Les Errues?" he demanded.

"Ask your terrified authorities. Perhaps they'll tell you—if their teeth stop chattering long enough—that I came here to find out what the Boche are doing on neutral territory."

"Do you mean to say that you believe in that absurd rumour about some secret and gigantic undertaking by the Germans which is supposed to be visible from the plateau below us?"

And, as McKay made no reply: "That is a silly fabrication. If your Government, suspicious of the neutrality of mine, sent you here on any such errand, it was a ridiculous thing to do. Do you hear me, McKay?"

"I hear you."

"Well, then! And let me add also that it is a physical impossibility for any man to reach the plateau below us from the forest of Les Errues!"

"That," said McKay, coldly, "is a lie!"

"What! You offer a Swiss officer such an injury——"

"Yes; and I may add an insulting bullet to the injury in another minute. You've lied to me. I

have already done what you say is an impossibility. I have reached the plateau below Les Errues by way of this forest. And I'm going there again, Swiss or no Swiss, Hun or no Hun! And if the Boche do drive me out of this forest into the east, where you say there is no water to be found among the brush and bowlders, and where, at last, you say I shall stand with my back to the last sheer precipice, then tell your observation post on the white shoulder of Thusis to turn their telescopes on me!"

"In God's name, for what purpose?"

"To take a lesson in how to die from the man your nation has betrayed!" drawled McKay.

Then, lying flat, he levelled his pistol, supporting it across the palm of his left hand.

"Yellow-hair?"' he said in a guarded voice, not turning.

"Yes, Kay."

"Slip the pack over your shoulders. Take the pigeon and the rifle. Be quick, dear."

"It is done," she said softly.

"Now get up and make no noise. Two men are lying in the scrub behind that fellow across the chasm. I am afraid they have grenades. . . . Are you ready, Yellow-hair?"

"Ready, dear."

"Go eastward, swiftly, two hundred yards parallel with the precipice. Make no sound, Yellow-hair."

The girl cast a pallid, heart-breaking look at him, but he lay there without turning his head, his steady pistol levelled across the chasm. Then, bending a trifle forward, she stole eastward through the forest

dusk, the pigeon in its wicker cage in one hand, and on her back the pack.

And all the while, across the gulf out of which golden vapours curled more thickly as the sun's burning searchlight spread out across the world, the man in Swiss uniform stood on the chasm's edge, as though awaiting some further word or movement from McKay.

And, after awhile, the word came, clear, startling, snapped out across the void:

"Unsling that haversack! Don't touch the flap! Take it off, quick!"

The Swiss seemed astounded. "Quick!" repeated McKay harshly, "or I fire."

"What!" burst out the man, "you offer violence to a Swiss officer on duty within Swiss territory?"

"I tell you I'll kill you where you stand if you don't take off that haversack!"

Suddenly from the scrubby thicket behind the Swiss a man's left arm shot up at an angle of forty degrees, and the right arm described an arc against the sun. Something round and black parted from it, lost against the glare of sunrise.

Then in the woods behind McKay something fell heavily, the solid thud obliterated in the shattering roar which followed.

The man in Swiss uniform tore at the flap of his haversack, and he must have jerked loose the plug of a grenade in his desperate haste, for as McKay's bullet crashed through his face, the contents of his sack exploded with a deafening crash.

At the same instant two more bombs fell among

the trees behind McKay, exploding instantly. Smoke and the thick golden steam from the ravine blotted from his sight the crag opposite. And now, bending double, McKay ran eastward while behind him the golden dusk of the woods roared and flamed with exploding grenades.

Evelyn Erith stood motionless and deathly white, awaiting him.

"Are you all right, Kay?"

"All right, Yellow-hair."

He went up to her, shifting his pistol to the other hand, and as he laid his right arm about her shoulders the blaze in his eyes almost dazzled her.

"We trust no living thing on earth, you and I, Yellow-hair. . . . I believed that man for awhile. But I tell you whatever is living within this forest is our enemy—and if any man comes in the shape of my dearest friend I shall kill him before he speaks!"

The man was shaking now; the girl caught his right hand and drew it close around her body—that once warm and slender body now become so chill and thin under the ragged clothing of a boy.

"Drop your face on my shoulder," she said.

His wasted cheek seemed feverish, burning against her breast.

"Steady, Kay," she whispered.

"Right! . . . What got me was the thought of you—there when the grenades fell. . . . They blew a black pit where your blanket lay!"

He lifted his head and she smiled into the fever-bright eyes set so deeply now in his ravaged visage.

There were words on her lips, trembling to be uttered. But she dared not believe they would add to his strength if spoken. He loved her. She had long known that—had long understood that loving her had not hardened his capacity for the dogged duty which lay before him.

To win out was a task sufficiently desperate; to win out and bring her through alive was the double task that was slowly, visibly killing this man whose burning, sunken eyes gazed into hers. She dared not triple that task; the cry in her heart died unuttered, lest he ever waver in duty to his country when in some vital crisis that sacred duty clashed with the obligations that fettered him to a girl who had confessed she loved him.

No; the strength that he might derive from such a knowledge was not that deathless energy and clear thinking necessary to blind, stern, unswerving devotion to the motherland. Love of woman, and her love given, could only make the burden of decision triply heavy for this man who stood staring at space beside her here in the forest twilight where shreds of the night mist floated like ghosts and a lost sunspot glowed and waned and glowed on last year's leaves.

The girl pressed her waist with his arm, straightened her shoulders and stood erect; and with a quick gesture cleared her brow of its cloudy golden hair.

"Now," she said coolly, "we carry on, you and I, Kay, to the honour and glory of the land that trusts us in her hour of need. . . Are you are right again?"

"All right, Yellow-hair," he said pleasantly.

On the third day the drive had forced them from the hilly western woods, eastward and inexorably toward that level belt of shaggy forest, scrub growth, and arid, bowlder-strewn table-land where there was probably no water, nothing living to kill for food, and only the terrific ravines beyond where cliffs fell downward to the dim green world lying somewhere below under its blanket of Alpine mist.

On the fourth day, still crowded outward and toward the ragged edge of the mountain world, they found, for the first time, no water to fill their bottles. Realising their plight, McKay turned desperately westward, facing pursuit, ranging the now narrow forest in hopes of an opportunity to break through the closing line of beaters.

But it proved to be a deadline that he and his half-starved comrade faced; shadowy figures, half seen, sometimes merely heard and divined, flitted everywhere through the open woods beyond them. And at night a necklace of fires—hundreds of them—barred the west to them, curving outward like the blade of a flaming scimitar.

On the fifth day McKay, lying in his blanket beside the girl, told her that if they found no water that day they must let their carrier-pigeon go.

The girl sat up in her torn blanket and met his gaze very calmly. What he had just said to her meant the beginning of the end. She understood perfectly. But her voice was sweet and undisturbed as she answered him, and they quietly discussed the chances of discovering water in some sunken hole

among the outer ledges and bowlders whither they were being slowly and hopelessly forced.

Noon found them still searching for some pocket of stale rain-water; but once only did they discover the slightest trace of moisture—a crust of slime in a rocky basin, and from it a blind lizard was slowly creeping—a heavy, lustreless, crippled thing that toiled aimlessly and painfully up the rock, only to slide back into the slime again, leaving a trail of iridescent moisture where its sagging belly dragged.

In a grove of saplings there were a few ferns; and here McKay dug with his trench knife; but the soil proved to be very shallow; everywhere rock lay close to the surface; there was no water there under the black mould.

To and fro they roamed, doggedly seeking for some sign of water. And the woods seemed damp, too; and there were long reaches of dewy ferns. But wherever McKay dug, his knife soon touched the solid rock below. And they wandered on.

In the afternoon, resting in the shade, he noticed her lips were bleeding—and turned away, sharply, unable to endure her torture. She seemed to understand his abrupt movement, for she leaned slightly against him where he sat amid the ferns with his back to a tree—as a dog leans when his master is troubled.

"I think," she said with an effort, "we should release our pigeon now. It seems to be very weak."

He nodded.

The bird appeared languid; hunger and thirst

were now telling fast on the little feathered messenger.

Evelyn shook out the last dusty traces of corn; McKay removed the bands. But the bird merely pecked at the food once or twice and then settled down with beak gaping and the film stealing over its eyes.

McKay wrote on tissue the date and time of day; and a word more to say that they had, now, scarcely any chance. He added, however, that others ought to try because there was no longer any doubt in his mind that the Boche were still occupied with some gigantic work along the Swiss border in the neighbourhood of Mount Terrible; and that the Swiss Government, if not abetting, at least was cognizant of the Hun activities.

This message he rolled into a quill, fastened it, took the bird, and tossed it westward into the air.

The pigeon beat the morning breeze feebly for a moment, then fluttered down to the top of a rock.

For five minutes that seemed five years they looked at the bird, which had settled down in the sun, its bright eyes alternately dimmed by the film or slowly clearing.

Then, as they watched, the pigeon stood up and stretched its neck skyward, peering hither and thither at the blue vault above. And suddenly it rose, painfully, higher, higher, seeming to acquire strength in the upper air levels. The sun flashed on its wings as it wheeled; then the distant bird swept westward into a long straight course, flying steadily until it vanished like a mote in mid-air.

McKay did not trust himself to speak. Presently he slipped his pack over both shoulders and took the rifle from where it lay against a rock. The girl, too, had picked up the empty wicker cage, but recollected herself and let it fall on the dead leaves.

Neither she nor McKay had spoken. The latter stood staring down at the patch of ferns into which the cage had rolled. And it was some time before his dulled eyes noticed that there was grass growing there, too—swale grass, which he had not before seen in this arid eastern region.

When finally he realised what it might signify he stood staring; a vague throb of hope stirred the thin blood in his sunken cheeks. But he dared not say that he hoped; he merely turned northward in silence and moved into the swale grass. And his slim comrade followed.

Half an hour later he waited for the girl to come up along side of him. "Yellow-hair," he said, "this is swale or marsh-grass we are following. And little wild creatures have made a runway through it . . . as though there were—a drinking-place—somewhere——"

He forced himself to look up at her—at her dry, blood-blackened lips:

"Lean on me," he whispered, and threw his arm around her.

And so, slowly, together, they came through the swale to a living spring.

A dead roe-deer lay there—stiffened into an indescribable attitude of agony where it had fallen writhing in the swale; and its terrible convulsions

had torn up and flattened the grass and ferns around it.

And, as they gazed at this pitiable dead thing, something else stirred on the edge of the pool—a dark, slim bird, that strove to move at the water's edge, struggled feebly, then fell over and lay a crumpled mound of feathers.

"Oh God!" whispered the girl, "there are dead birds lying everywhere at the water's edge! And little furry creatures—dead—all dead at the water's edge!"

There was a flicker of brown wings: a bird alighted at the pool, peered fearlessly right and left, drank, bent its head to drink again, fell forward twitching and lay there beating the grass with feeble wings.

After a moment only one wing quivered. Then the little bird lay still.

Perhaps an ancient and tragic instinct possessed these two—for as a wild thing, mortally hurt, wanders away through solitude to find a spot in which to die, so these two moved slowly away together into the twilight of the trees, unconscious, perhaps, what they were seeking, but driven into aimless motion toward that appointed place.

And somehow it is given to the stricken to recognise the ghostly spot when they draw near it and their appointed hour approaches.

There was a fallen tree—not long fallen—which in its earthward crash had hit another smaller tree, partly uprooting the latter so that it leaned at a perilous angle over a dry gully below.

Here dead leaves had drifted deep. And here these two came, and crept in among the withered branches and lay down among the fallen leaves. For a long while they lay motionless. Then she moved, turned over, and slipped into his arms.

Whether she slept or whether her lethargy was unconsciousness due to privation he could not tell. Her parted lips were blackened, her mouth and tongue swollen.

He held her for awhile, conscious that a creeping stupor threatened his senses—making no effort to save his mind from the ominous shadows that crept toward him like live things moving slowly, always a little nearer. Then pain passed through him like a piercing thread of fire, and he struggled upright, and saw her head slide down across his knees. And he realised that there were things for him to do yet —arrangements to make before the crawling shadows covered his body and stained his mind with the darkness of eternal night.

And first, while she still lay across his knees, he filled his pistol. Because she must die quickly if the Hun came. For when the Hun comes death is woman's only sanctuary.

So he prepared a swift salvation for her. And, if the Hun came or did not come, still this last refuge must be secured for her before the creeping shadows caught him and the light in his mind died out.

With his loaded pistol lifted he sat a moment, staring into the woods out of bloodshot eyes; then he summoned all his strength and rose, letting his

unconscious comrade slip from his knees to the bed of dead leaves.

Now with his knife he tried the rocky forest floor again, feeling blindly for water. He tried slashing saplings for a drop of sap.

The great tree that had fallen had broken off a foot above ground. The other tree slanted above a dry gully at such an angle that it seemed as though a touch would push it over, yet its foliage was still green and unwilted although the mesh of roots and earth were all exposed.

He noted this in a dull way, thinking always of water. And presently, scarcely knowing what he was doing, he placed both arms against the leaning trunk and began to push. And felt the leaning tree sway slowly earthward.

Then into the pain and confusion of his clouding mind something flashed with a dazzling streak of light—the flare-up of dying memory; and he hurled himself against the leaning tree. And it slowly sank, lying level and uprooted.

And in the black bed of the roots lay darkling a little pool of water.

The girl's eyes unclosed on his. Her face and lips were dripping under the sopping, icy sponge of green moss with which he was bathing her and washing out her mouth and tongue.

Into her throat he squeezed the water, drop by drop only.

It was late in the afternoon before he dared let her drink.

During the night she slept an hour or two, awoke to ask for water, then slept again, only to awake to the craving that he always satisfied.

Before sunrise he took his pack, took both her shoes from her feet, tore some rags from the lining of her skirt and from his own coat, and leaving her asleep, went out into the grey dusk of morning.

When he again came to the poisoned spring he unslung his pack and, holding it by both straps, dragged it through marsh grass and fern, out through the fringe of saplings, out through low scrub and brake and over moss and lichens to the edge of the precipice beyond.

And here on a scrubby bush he left fragments of their garments entangled; and with his hobnailed heels he broke crumbling edges of rock and smashed the moss and stunted growth and tore a path among the Alpine roses which clothed the chasm's treacherous edge, so that it might seem as though a heavy object had plunged down into the gulf below.

Such bowlders as he could stir from their beds and roll over he dislodged and pushed out, listening to them as they crashed downward, tearing the cliff's grassy face until, striking some lower shelf, they bounded out into space.

Now in this bruised path he stamped the imprints of her two rough shoes in moss and soil, and drove his own iron-shod feet wherever lichen or earth would retain the imprint.

All the footprints pointed one way and ended at the chasm's edge. And there, also, he left the wicker cage; and one of his pistols, too—the last

and most desperate effort to deceive—for, near it, he flung the cartridge belt with its ammunition intact—on the chance that the Hun would believe the visible signs, because only a dying man would abandon such things.

For they must believe the evidence he had prepared for them—this crazed trail of two poisoned human creatures—driven by agony and madness to their own destruction.

And now, slinging on his pack, he made his way, walking backward, to the poisoned spring.

It was scarcely light, yet through the first ghostly grey of daybreak a few birds came; and he killed four with bits of rock before the little things could drink the sparkling, crystalline death that lay there silvered by the dawn.

She was still asleep when he came once more to the bed of leaves between the fallen trees. And she had not awakened when he covered his dry fire and brought to her the broth made from the birds.

There was, in his pack, a little food left. When he awakened her she smiled and strove to rise, but he took her head on his knees and fed her, holding the pannikin to her lips. And after he too had eaten he went to look into the hollow where the tree had stood; and found it brimming with water.

So he filled his bottles; then, with hands and knife, working cautiously and noiselessly he began to enlarge the basin, drawing out stones, scooping out silt and fibre.

All the morning he worked at his basin, which,

fed by some deep-seated and living spring, now overflowed and trickled down into the dry gully below.

By noon he had a pool as large and deep as a bathtub; and he came and sat down beside her under the fallen mass of branches where she lay watching the water bubble up and clear itself of the clouded silt.

"You are very wonderful, Kay," she sighed, but her bruised lips smiled at him and her scarred hand crept toward him and lay in his. Seated so, he told her what he had done in the grey of morning while she slept.

And, even as he was speaking, a far voice cried through the woods—distant, sinister as the harsh scream of a hawk that has made its kill.

Then another voice shouted, hoarse with triumph; others answered, near and far; the forest was full of the heavy, ominous sounds. For the Huns were gathering in eastward from the wooded western hills, and their sustained clamour filled the air like the unclean racket of vultures sighting abomination and eager to feed.

McKay laid his loaded pistol beside him.

"Dear Yellow-hair," he whispered.

She smiled up at him. "If they think we died there on the edge of the precipice, then you and I should live. . . . If they doubt it they will come back through these woods. . . . And it isn't likely that we shall live very long."

"I know," she said. And laid her other hand in his—a gesture of utter trust so exquisite that, for a

moment, tears blinded him, and all the forest wavered grotesquely before his desperately fixed gaze. And presently, within the field of his vision, something moved—a man going westward among the trees his rifle slung over his shoulder. And there were others, too, plodding stolidly back toward the western forests of Les Errues—forms half-seen between trees, none near, and only two who passed within hearing, the trample of their heavy feet loud among the fallen leaves, their guttural voices distinct. And, as they swung westward, rifles slung, pipes alight, and with the air of surly hunters homeward bound after a successful kill, the hunted, lying close under their roof of branches, heard them boasting of their work and of the death their quarry had died—of their agony at the spring which drove them to that death in the depths of the awful gulf beyond.

"And that," shouted one, stifling with laughter, "I should like to have seen. It is all I have to regret of this *jagd*—that I did not see the *wilde* die!"

The other Hun was less cheerful: "But what a pity to leave that roe-deer lying there. Such good meat poisoned! *Schade*, *immer schade!*—to leave good meat like that in the forest of Les Errues!"

CHAPTER XI

VIA MALA

THE girl sat bolt upright on her bed of dead leaves, still confused by sleep, her ears ringing with the loud, hard voice which had awakened her to consciousness of pain and hunger once again.

Not ten feet from her, between where she lay under the branches of a fallen tree, and the edge of the precipice beyond, full in the morning sunlight stood two men in the dress of Swiss mountaineers.

One of them was reading aloud from a notebook in a slow, decisive, metallic voice; the other, swinging two dirty flags, signalled the message out across the world of mountains as it was read to him in that nasty, nasal Berlin dialect of a Prussian junker.

"In the Staubbach valley no traces of the bodies have been discovered," continued the tall, square-shouldered reader in his deliberate voice; "It is absolutely necessary that the bodies of these two American secret agents, Kay McKay and Evelyn Erith, be discovered, and all their papers, personal property, and the clothing and accoutrements belonging to them be destroyed without the slightest trace remaining.

"It is ordered also that, when discovered, their bodies be burned and the ashes reduced to powder and sown broadcast through the forest."

The voice stopped; the signaller whipped his dirty tattered flags in the sunlight for a few moments more, then ceased and stood stiffly at attention, his sun-dazzled gaze fixed on a far mountain slope where something glittered—perhaps a bit of mica, perhaps the mirror of a helio.

Presently, in the same disagreeable, distinct, nasal, and measured voice, the speaker resumed the message:

"Until last evening it has been taken for granted that the American Intelligence Officer, McKay, and his companion, Miss Erith, made insane through suffering after having drunk at a spring the water of which we had prepared for them according to plan, had either jumped or fallen from the eastward cliffs of Les Errues into the gulf through which flows the Staubbach.

"But, up to last night, my men, who descended by the Via Mala, have been unable to find the bodies of these two Americans, although there is, on the cliffs above, every evidence that they plunged down there to the valley of the brook below, which is now being searched.

"If, therefore, my men fail to discover these bodies, the alarming presumption is forced upon us that these two Americans have once more tricked us; and that they may still be hiding in the Forbidden Forest of Les Errues.

"In that event proper and drastic measures will be taken, the air-squadron on the northern frontier co-operating."

The voice ceased: the flags whistled and snapped

in the wind for a little while longer, then the signaller came to stiffest attention.

"Tell them we descend by the Via Mala," added the nasal voice.

The flags swung sharply into motion for a few moments more; then the Prussian officer pocketed his notebook; the signaller furled his flags; and, as they turned and strode westward along the border of the forest, the girl rose to her knees on her bed of leaves and peered after them.

What to do she scarcely knew. Her comrade, McKay, had been gone since dawn in quest of something to keep their souls and bodies *en liaison*—mountain hare, a squirrel perhaps, perhaps a songbird or two, or a pocketful of coral mushrooms—anything to keep them alive on that heart-breaking trail of duty at the end of which sat old man Death awaiting them, wearing a spiked helmet.

And what to do in this emergency, and in the absence of McKay, perplexed and frightened her; for her comrade's strict injunction was to remain hidden until his return; and yet one of these men now moving westward there along the forest's sunny edges had spoken of a way out and had called it the Via Mala. And that is what McKay had been looking for—a way out of the Forbidden Forest of Les Errues to the table-land below, where, through a cleft still more profound, rushed the black Staubbach under an endless mist of icy spray.

She must make up her mind quickly; the two men were drawing away from her—almost out of sight now.

On her ragged knees among the leaves she groped for his coat where he had flung it, for the weather had turned oppressive in the forest of Les Errues—and fumbling, she found his notebook and pencil, and tore out a leaf:

"Kay dear, two Prussians in Swiss mountain dress have been signalling across the knees of Thusis that our bodies have not been discovered in the ravine. They have started for the ravine by a way evidently known to them and which they speak of as the Via Mala. You told me to stay here, but I dare not let this last chance go to discover what we have been looking for—a path to the plateau below. I take my pistol and your trench-knife and I will try to leave signs for you to follow. They have started west along the cliffs and they are now nearly out of sight, so I must hurry. Yellow-hair."

This bit of paper she left on her bed of leaves and pinned it to the ground with a twig. Then she rose painfully, drew in her belt and laced her tattered shoes, and, taking the trench-knife and pistol, limped out among the trees.

The girl was half naked in her rags; her shirt scarcely hung to her shoulders, and she fastened the stag-horn buttons on her jacket. Her breeches, which left both knees bare, were of leather and held out pretty well, but the heavy wool stockings gaped, and, had it not been for the hob-nails, the soles must have fallen from her hunter's shoes.

At first she moved painfully and stiffly, but as she hurried, limping forward over the forest moss, limbs and body grew more supple and she felt less pain.

And now, not far beyond, and still full in the morning sunshine, marched the men she was following. The presumed officer strode on ahead, a high-shouldered frame of iron in his hunter's garb; the signaller with furled flags tucked under his arm clumped stolidly at his heels with the peculiar peasant gait which comes from following uneven furrows in the wake of a plow.

For ten minutes, perhaps, the two men continued on, then halted before a great mass of débris, uprooted trees, long dead, the vast, mangled roots and tops of which sprawled in every direction between masses of rock, bowlders, and an indescribable confusion of brush and upheaved earth.

Nearer and nearer crept the girl, until, lying flat behind a beech-tree, she rested within earshot—so close, indeed, that she could smell the cigarette which the officer had lighted—smell, even, the rank stench of the sulphur match.

Meanwhile the signaller had laid aside his flags and while the officer looked on he picked up a heavy sapling from among the fallen trees. Using this as a lever he rolled aside a tree-trunk, then another, and finally a bowlder.

"That will do," remarked the officer. "Take your flags and go ahead."

Then Evelyn Erith, rising cautiously to her scarred knees, saw the signaller gather up his flags and step into what apparently was the bed of the bowlder on the edge of the windfall. But it was deeper than that, for he descended to his knees, to his waist, his shoulders; and then his head disap-

peared into some hole which she could not see.

Now the officer who had remained, calmly smoking his cigarette, flung the remains of it over the cliff, turned, surveyed the forest behind him with minute deliberation, then stepped into the excavation down which the signaller had disappeared.

Some instinct kept the girl motionless after the man's head had vanished; minute after minute passed, and Evelyn Erith never stirred. And suddenly the officer's head and shoulders popped up from the hole and he peered back at the forest like an alarmed marmot. And the girl saw his hands resting on the edge of the hole; and the hands grasped two pistols.

Presently, apparently reassured and convinced that nobody was attempting to follow him, he slowly sank out of sight once more.

The girl waited; and while waiting she cut a long white sliver from the beech-tree and carved an arrow pointing toward the heap of débris. Then, with the keen tip of her trench-knife she scratched on the silvery bark:

"An underground way in the windfall. I have followed them. Yellow-hair."

She crept stealthily out into the sunshine through the vast abatis of the fallen trees and came to the edge of the hole. Looking down fearfully she realised at once that this was the dry, rocky stairs of some subterranean watercourse through which, in springtime, great fields of melting snow poured in torrents down the face of the precipice below.

There were no loose stones to be seen; the rocky

escalier had been swept clean unnumbered ages since; but the rocks were fearfully slippery, shining with a vitreous polish where the torrents of many thousand years had worn them smooth.

And this was what they called the Via Mala!—this unsuspected and secret underground way that led, God knew how, into the terrific depths below.

There was another Via Mala: she had seen it from Mount Terrible; but it was a mountain path trodden not infrequently. This Via Mala, however, wormed its way downward into shadows. Where it led and by what perilous ways she could only imagine. And were these men perhaps, lying in ambush for her somewhere below—on the chance that they might have been seen and followed?

What would they do to her—shoot her? Push her outward from some rocky shelf into the misty gulf below? Or would they spring on her and take her alive? At the thought she chilled, knowing what a woman might expect from the Hun.

She threw a last look upward where they say God dwells somewhere behind the veil of blinding blue; then she stepped downward into the shadows.

For a rod or two she could walk upright as long as she could retain her insecure footing on the glassy, uneven floor of rock; and a vague demi-light reigned there making objects distinct enough for her to see the stalactites and stalagmites like discoloured teeth in a *chevaux-de-frise*.

Between these gaping fangs she crept, listening, striving to set her feet on the rocks without making any noise. But that seemed to be impossible and

the rocky tunnel echoed under her footsteps, slipping, sliding, hob-nails scraping in desperate efforts not to fall.

Again and again she halted, listening fearfully, one hand crushed against her drumming heart; but she had heard no sound ahead; the men she followed must be some distance in advance; and she stole forward again, afraid, desperately crushing out the thoughts that crowded and surged in her brain—the terrible living swarm of fears that clamoured to her of the fate of white women if captured by the things men called Boche and Hun.

And now she was obliged to stoop as the roof of the tunnel dipped lower and she could scarcely see in the increasing darkness, clearly enough to avoid the stalactites.

However, from far ahead came a glimmer; and even when she was obliged to drop to her knees and creep forward, she could still make out the patch of light, and the Via Mala again became visible with its vitreous polished floor and its stalactites and water-blunted stalagmites always threatening to trip her and transfix her.

Now, very far ahead, something moved and partly obscured the distant glimmer; and she saw, at a great distance, the two men she followed, moving in silhouette across the light. When they had disappeared she ventured to move on again. And her knees were bleeding when she crept out along a heavy shelf of rock set like a balcony on the sheer face of the cliff.

Tufts of alpine roses grew on it, and slippery

lichens, and a few seedlings which next spring's torrent would wash away into the still, misty depths below.

But this shelf of rock was not all. The Via Mala could not end on the chasm's brink.

Cautiously she dragged herself out along the shadow of the cliff, listening, peering among the clefts now all abloom with *alpen rosen;* and saw nothing—no way forward; no steep path, hewn by man or by nature, along the face of that stupendous battlement of rock.

She lay listening. But if there was a river roaring somewhere through the gorge it was too far below her for her to hear it.

Nothing stirred there; the distant bluish parapets of rock across the ravine lay in full sunshine, but nothing moved there, neither man nor beast nor bird; and the tremendous loneliness of it all began to frighten her anew.

Yet she must go on; they had gone on; there was some hidden way. Where? Then, all in a moment, what she had noticed before, and had taken for a shadow cast by a slab of projecting rock, took the shape of a cleft in the façade of the precipice itself—an opening that led straight into the cliff.

When she dragged herself up to it she saw it had been made by man. The ancient scars of drills still marked it. Masses of rock had been blasted from it; but that must have been years ago because a deep growth of moss and lichen covered the scars and the tough stems of crag-shrubs masked every crack.

Here, too, bloomed the livid, over-rated edel-

weiss, dear to the maudlin and sentimental side of an otherwise wolfish race, its rather ghastly flowers starring the rocks.

As at the entrance to a tomb the girl stood straining her frightened eyes to pierce the darkness; then, feeling her way with outstretched pistol-hand, she entered.

The man-fashioned way was smooth. Or Hun or Swiss, whoever had wrought this Via Mala out of the eternal rock, had wrought accurately and well. The grade was not steep; the corridor descended by easy degrees, twisting abruptly to turn again on itself, but always leading downward in thick darkness.

No doubt that those accustomed to travel the Via Mala always carried lights; the air was clean and dry and any lighted torch could have lived in such an atmosphere. But Evelyn Erith carried no lights —had thought of none in the haste of setting out.

Years seemed to her to pass in the dreadful darkness of that descent as she felt her way downward, guided by the touch of her feet and the contact of her hand along the unseen wall.

Again and again she stopped to rest and to check the rush of sheerest terror that threatened at moments her consciousness.

There was no sound in the Via Mala. The thick darkness was like a fabric clogging her movements, swathing her, brushing across her so that she seemed actually to feel the horrible obscurity as some concrete thing impeding her and resting upon her with an increasing weight that bent her slender figure.

There was something grey ahead. . . . There was light—a sickly pin-point. It seemed to spread but grow duller. A pallid patch widened, became lighter again. And from an infinite distance there came a deadened roaring—the hollow menace of water rushing through depths unseen.

She stood within the shadow zone inside the tunnel and looked out upon the gorge where, level with the huge bowlders all around her, an alpine river raged and dashed against cliff and stone, flinging tons of spray into the air until the whole gorge was a driving sea of mist. Here was the floor of the cañon; here was the way they had searched for. Her task was done. And now, on bleeding little feet, she must retrace her steps; the Via Mala must become the Via Dolorosa, and she must turn and ascend that Calvary to the dreadful crest.

She was very weak. Privation had sapped the young virility that had held out so long. She had not eaten for a long while—did not, indeed, crave food any longer. But her thirst raged, and she knelt at a little pool within the cavern walls and bent her bleeding mouth to the icy fillet of water. She drank little, rinsed her mouth and face and dried her lips on her sleeve. And, kneeling so, closed her eyes in utter exhaustion for a moment.

And when she opened them she found herself looking up at two men.

Before she could move one of the men kicked her pistol out of her nerveless hand, caught her by the shoulder and dragged the trench-knife from her convulsive grasp. Then he said in English:

"Get up." And the other, the signalman, struck her across her back with the furled flags so that she lost her balance and fell forward on her face. They got her to her feet and pushed her out among the bowlders, through the storming spray, and across the floor of the ravine into the sunlight of a mossy place all set with trees. And she saw butterflies flitting there through green branches flecked with sunshine.

The officer seated himself on a fallen tree and crossed his heavy feet on a carpet of wild flowers. She stood erect, the signaller holding her right arm above the elbow.

After the officer had leisurely lighted a cigarette he asked her who she was. She made no answer.

"You are the Erith woman, are you not?" he demanded.

She was silent.

"You Yankee slut," he added, nodding to himself and staring up into her bloodless face.

Her eyes wandered; she looked at, but scarcely saw the lovely wildflowers under foot, the butterflies flashing their burnished wings among the sunbeams.

"Drop her arm." The signaller let go and stood at attention.

"Take her knife and pistol and your flags and go across the stream to the hut."

The signaller saluted, gathered the articles mentioned, and went away in that clumping, rocking gait of the land peasant of Hundom.

"Now," said the officer, "strip off your coat!"

She turned scarlet, but he sprang to his feet and tore her coat from her. She fought off every touch;

several times he struck her—once so sharply that the blood gushed from her mouth and nose; but still she fought him; and when he had completed his search of her person, he was furious, streaked with sweat and all smeared with her blood.

"Damned cat of a Yankee!" he panted, "stand there where you are or I'll blow your face off!"

But as he emptied the pockets of her coat she seized it and put it on, sobbing out her wrath and contempt of him and his threats as she covered her nearly naked body with the belted jacket and buttoned it to her throat.

He glanced at the papers she had carried, at the few poor articles that had fallen from her pockets, tossed them on the ground beside the log and resumed his seat and cigarette.

"Where's McKay?"

No answer.

"So you tricked us, eh?" he sneered. "You didn't get your rat-poison at the spring after all. The Yankees are foxes after all!" He laughed his loud, nasal, nickering laugh—"Foxes are foxes but men are men. Do you understand that, you damned vixen?"

"Will you let me kill myself?" she asked in a low but steady voice.

He seemed surprised, then realising why she had asked that mercy, showed all his teeth and smirked at her out of narrow-slitted eyes.

"Where is McKay?" he repeated.

She remained mute.

"Will you tell me where he is to be found?"

"No!"

"Will you tell me if I let you go?"

"No."

"Will you tell me if I give you back your trench-knife?"

The white agony in her face interested and amused him and he waited her reply with curiosity.

"No!" she whispered.

"Will you tell me where McKay is to be found if I promise to shoot you before——"

"No!" she burst out with a strangling sob.

He lighted another cigarette and, for a while, considered her musingly as he sat smoking. After a while he said: "You are rather dirty—all over blood. But you ought to be pretty after you're washed." Then he laughed.

The girl swayed where she stood, fighting to retain consciousness.

"How did you discover the Via Mala?" he inquired with blunt curiosity.

"You showed it to me!"

"You slut!" he said between his teeth. Then, still brutishly curious: "How did you know that spring had been poisoned? By those dead birds and animals, I suppose. . . . And that's what I told everybody, too. The wild things are bound to come and drink. But you and your running-mate are foxes. You made us believe you had gone over the cliff. Yes, even I believed it. It was well done—a true Yankee trick. All the same, foxes are only foxes after all. And here you are."

He got up; she shrank back, and he began to laugh at her.

"Foxes are only foxes, my pretty, dirty one!—but

men are men, and a Prussian is a super-man. You had forgotten that, hadn't you, little Yankee?"

He came nearer. She sprang aside and past him and ran for the river; but he caught her at the edge of a black pool that whirled and flung sticky chunks of foam over the bowlders. For a while they fought there in silence, then he said, breathing heavily, "A fox can't drown. Didn't you know that, little fool?"

Her strength was ebbing. He forced her back to the glade and stood there holding her, his inflamed face a sneering, leering mask for the hot hell that her nearness and resistance had awakened in him. Suddenly, still holding her, he jerked his head aside and stared behind him. Then he pushed her violently from him, clutched at his holster, and started to run. And a pistol cracked and he pitched forward across the log upon which he had sat, and lay so, dripping dark blood, and fouling the wild-flowers with the flow.

"Kay!" she said in a weak voice.

McKay, his pack strapped to his back, his bloodshot eyes brilliant in his haggard visage, ran forward and bent over the thing. Then he shot him again, behind the ear.

The rage of the river drowned the sound of the shots; the man in the hut across the stream did not come to the door. But McKay caught sight of the shack; his fierce eyes questioned the girl, and she nodded.

He crossed the stream, leaping from bowlder to bowlder, and she saw him run up to the door of the hut, level his weapon, then enter. She could

not hear the shots; she waited, half-dead, until he came out again, reloading his pistol.

She struggled desperately to retain her senses—to fight off the deadly faintness that assailed her. She could scarcely see him as he came swiftly toward her—she put out her arms blindly, felt his fierce clasp envelop her, passed so into blessed unconsciousness.

A drop or two of almost scalding broth aroused her. He held her in his arms and fed her—not much—and then let her stretch out on the sun-hot moss again.

Before sunset he awakened her again, and he fed her—more this time.

Afterward she lay on the moss with her golden-brown eyes partly open. And he had constructed a sponge of clean, velvety moss, and with this he washed her swollen mouth and bruised cheek, and her eyes and throat and hands and feet.

After the sun went down she slept again: and he stretched out beside her, one arm under her head and about her neck.

Moonlight pierced the foliage, silvering everything and inlaying the earth with the delicate tracery of branch and leaf.

Moonlight still silvered her face when she awoke. After a while the shadow slipped from his face, too.

"Kay?" she whispered.

"Yes, Yellow-hair."

And, after a little while she turned her face to his and her lips rested on his.

Lying so, unstirring, she fell asleep once more.

CHAPTER XII

THE GREAT SECRET

ALL that morning American infantry had been passing through Delle over the Belfort road. The sun of noon saw no end to them. The endless column of shadows, keeping pace with them, lengthened with the afternoon along their lengthening line.

Now and then John Recklow opened the heavy wooden door in his garden wall and watched them until duty called him to his telephone or to his room where maps and papers littered the long table. But he always returned to the door in the garden wall when duty permitted and leaned at ease there, smoking his pipe, keen-eyed, impassive, gazing on the unbroken line of young men—men of his own race, sun-scorched, dusty, swinging along the Belfort road, their right elbows brushing Switzerland, their high sun-reddened pillar of dust drifting almost into Germany, and their heavy tread thundering through that artery of France like the prophetic pulse of victory.

A rich September sunset light streamed over them; like a moving shaft of divine fire the ruddy dust marched with them upon their right hand; legions of avenging shadows led them forward where, for nearly half a century beyond the barriers

of purple hills, naked and shackled, the martyr-daughters of the Motherland stood waiting—Alsace and Lorraine.

"We are on our way!" laughed the Yankee bugles.

The Fortress of Metz growled "Nein!"

Recklow went back to his telephone. For a long while he remained there very busy with Belfort and Verdun. When again he returned to the green door in his garden wall, the Yankee infantry had passed; and of their passing there remained no trace save for the smouldering pillar of fire towering now higher than the eastern horizon and lengthened to a wall that ran away into the north as far as the eye could see.

His cats had come out into the garden for "the cats' hour"—that mysterious compromise between day and evening when all things feline awake and stretch and wander or sit motionless, alert, listening to occult things. And in the enchantment of that lovely *liaison* which links day and night—when the gold and rose soften to mauve as the first star is born—John Recklow raised his quiet eyes and saw two dead souls come into his garden by the little door in the wall.

"Is it you, Kay McKay?" he said at last.

But the shock of the encounter still fettered him so that he walked very slowly to the woman who was now moving toward him across the grass.

"Evelyn Erith," he said, taking her thin hands in his own, which were trembling now.

"It's a year," he complained unsteadily.

"More than a year," said McKay in his dead voice.

With his left hand, then, John Recklow took McKay's gaunt hand, and stood so, mute, looking at him and at the girl beside him.

"God!" he said blankly. Then, with no emphasis: "It's rather more than a year! . . . They sent me two fire-charred skulls—the head of a man and the head of a woman. . . . That was a year ago. . . . After your pigeon arrived . . . I found the scorched skulls wrapped in a Swiss newspaper—lying inside the garden wall—over there on the grass! . . . And the swine had written your names on the skulls. . . ."

Into Evelyn Erith's eyes there came a vague light—the spectre of a smile. And as Recklow looked at her he remembered the living glory she had once been; and wrath blazed wildly within him. "What have they done to you?" he asked in an unsteady voice. But McKay laid his hand on Recklow's arm:

"Nothing. It is what they have not done—fed her. That's all she needs—and sleep."

Recklow gazed heavily upon her. But if the young fail rapidly, they also respond quickly.

"Come into the house,"

Perhaps it was the hot broth with wine in it that brought a slight colour back into her ghastly face—the face once so youthfully lovely but now as delicate as the mask of death itself.

Candles twinkled on the little table where the girl

now lay back listlessly in the depths of an armchair, her chin sunk on her breast.

Recklow sat opposite her, writing on a pad in shorthand. McKay, resting his ragged elbows on the cloth, his haggard face between both hands, went on talking in a colourless, mechanical voice which an iron will alone flogged into speech:

"Killed two of them and took their clothes and papers," he continued monotonously; "that was last August—near the end of the month. . . . The Boche had tens of thousands working there. *And every one of them was insane.*"

"What!"

"Yes, that is the way they were operating—the only way they dared operate. I think all that enormous work has been done by the insane during the last forty years. You see, the Boche have nothing to dread from the insane. Anyway the majority of them died in harness. Those who became useless—intractable or crippled—were merely returned to the asylums from which they had been drafted. And the Hun government saw to it that nobody should have access to them.

"Besides, who would believe a crazy man or woman if they babbled about the Great Secret?"

He covered his visage with his bony hands and rested so for a few moments, then, forcing himself again:

"The Hun for forty years has drafted the insane from every asylum in the Empire to do this gigantic work for him. Men, women, even children, chained, guarded, have done the physical

work. . . . The Pyramids were builded so, they say. . . . And in this manner is being finished that colossal engineering work which is never spoken of among the Huns except when necessary, and which is known among them as The Great Secret. . . . Recklow, it was conceived as a vast engineering project forty-eight years ago—in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian war. It was begun that same year. . . . And it is practically finished. Except for one obstacle."

Recklow's lifted eyes stared at him over his pad.

"It is virtually finished," repeated McKay in his toneless, unaccented voice which carried such terrible conviction to the other man. "Forty-eight years ago the Hun planned a huge underground highway carrying four lines of railroad tracks. It was to begin east of the Rhine in the neighbourhood of Zell, slant into the bowels of the earth, pass deep under the Rhine, deep under the Swiss frontier, deep, deep under Mount Terrible and under the French frontier, and emerge in France *behind* Belfort, Toul, Nancy, and Verdun."

Recklow laid his pad on the table and looked intently at McKay. The latter said in his ghost of a voice: "You are beginning to suspect my sanity." He turned with an effort and fixed his hollow eyes on Evelyn Erith.

"We are sane," he said. "But I don't blame you, Recklow. We have lived among the mad for more than a year—among thousands and thousands and thousands of them—of men and women and even children in whose minds the light of reason had

died out. . . . Thirty thousand dying minds in which only a dreadful twilight reigned! . . . I don't know how we endured it—and retained our reason. . . . Do you, Yellow-hair?"

The girl did not reply. He spoke to her again, then fell silent. For the girl slept, her delicate, deathly face dropped forward on her breast.

Presently McKay turned to Recklow once more; and Recklow picked up his pad with a slight shudder.

"Forty-eight years," repeated McKay—"and the work of the Hun is nearly done—a wide highway under the earth's surface flanked by four lines of rails—broad-gauge tracks—everything now working, all rolling-stock and electric engines moving smoothly and swiftly. . . . Two tracks carry troops; two carry ammunition and munitions. A highway a hundred feet wide runs between.

"Ten miles from the Rhine, under the earth, there is a Hun city, with a garrison of sixty thousand men! . . . There are other cities along the line——"

"Deep down!"

"Deep under the earth."

"There must be shafts!" said Recklow hoarsely.

"None."

"No shafts to the surface?"

"Not one."

"No pipe? No communication with the outer air?"

Then McKay's sunken eyes glittered and he stiffened up, and his wasted features seemed to shrink until the parting of his lips showed his teeth. It

was a dreadful laughter—his manner, now, of expressing mirth.

"Recklow," he said, "in 1914 that vast enterprise was scheduled to be finished according to plan. With the declaration of war in August the Hun was to have blasted his way to the surface of French soil behind the barrier forts! He was prepared to do it in half an hour's time.

"Do you understand? Do you see how it was planned? For forty-eight years the Hun had been preparing to seize France and crush Europe.

"When the Hun was ready he murdered the Austrian archduke—the most convenient solution of the problem for the Hun Kaiser, who presented himself with the pretext for war by getting rid of the only Austrian with whom he couldn't do business."

Again McKay laughed, silently, showing his discoloured teeth.

"So the archduke died according to plan; and there was war—according to plan. And then, Recklow, *God's hand moved!*—very slightly—indolently—scarcely stirring at all. . . . A drop of icy water percolated the limestone on Mount Terrible; other drops followed; linked by these drops a thin stream crept downward in the earth along the limestone fissures, washing away glacial sands that had lodged there since time began." . . . He leaned forward and his brilliant, sunken eyes peered into Recklow's:

"Since 1914," he said, "the Staubbach has fallen into the bowels of the earth and the Hun has been fighting it miles under the earth's surface.

"They can't operate from the glacier on the white Shoulder of Thusis; whenever they calk it and plug it and stop it with tons of reinforced waterproof concrete—whenever on the surface of the world they dam it and turn it into new channels, it evades them. And in a new place its icy water bursts through—as though every stratum in the Alps dipped toward their underground tunnel to carry the water from the Glacier of Thusis into it!"

He clenched his wasted hands and struck the table without a sound:

"God blocks them, damn them!" he said in his ghost of a voice. "God bars the Boche! They shall not pass!"

He leaned nearer, twisting his clenched fingers together: "We saw them, Recklow. We saw the Staubbach fighting for right of way; we saw the Hun fighting the Staubbach—Darkness battling with Light!—the Hun against the Most High!—miles under the earth's crust, Recklow. . . . Do you believe in God?"

"Yes."

"Yes. . . . We saw Him at work—that young girl asleep there, and I—month after month we watched Him check and dismay the modern Pharaoh—we watched Him countermine the Nibelungen and mock their filthy Gott! And Recklow, we laughed, sometimes, where laughter among clouded minds means nothing—nothing even to the Hun—nor causes suspicion nor brings punishment other than the accustomed kick and blow which the Hun reserves for all who are helpless." . . . He bowed

his head in his hands. "All who are weak and stricken," he whispered to himself.

Recklow said: "Did they harm—*her?*" And McKay looked up at that, baring his teeth in a swift snarl:

"No—you see her clipped hair—and the thin body. . . . In her blouse she passed for a boy, unquestioned, unnoticed. There were thousands of us, you see. . . . Some of the insane women were badly treated—all of the younger ones. . . . But she and I were together. . . . And I had my pistol in reserve—for the crisis!—always in reserve—always ready for her." Recklow nodded. McKay went on:

"We fought the Staubbach in shifts. . . . And all through those months of autumn and winter there was no chance for us to get away. It is not cold under ground. . . . It was like a dark, thick dream. We tried to realise that war was going on, over our heads, up above us somewhere in daylight—where there was sun and where stars were. . . . It was like a thick dream, Recklow. The stars seemed very far. . . ."

"You had passed as inmates of some German asylum?"

"We had killed two landwehr on the Staubbach. That was a year ago last August——" He looked at the sleeping girl beside him: "My little comrade and I undressed the swine and took their uniforms. . . . After a long while—privations had made us both light-headed I think—we saw a camp of the insane in the woods—a fresh relay from Mul-

haus. We talked with their guards—being in Landwehr uniform it was easy. The insane were clothed like miners. Late that night we exchanged clothes with two poor, demented creatures who retained sufficient reason, however, to realise that our uniforms meant freedom. . . . They crept away into the forest. We remained. . . . And marched at dawn—straight into the jaws of the Great Secret!"

Recklow had remained at the telephone until dawn. And now Belfort was through with him and Verdun understood, and Paris had relayed to Headquarters and Headquarters had instructed John Recklow.

Before Recklow went to bed he parted his curtain and looked out at the misty dawn.

In the silvery dusk a cock-pheasant was crowing somewhere on a wheat-field's edge. A barnyard chanticleer replied. Clear and truculent rang out the challenge of the Gallic cock in the dawn, warning his wild neighbour to keep to the wilds. So the French trumpets challenge the shrill, barbaric fanfares of the Hun, warning him back into the dull and shadowy wilderness from whence he ventured.

Recklow was awake, dressed, and had breakfasted by eight o'clock.

McKay, in his little chamber on the right, still slept. Evelyn Erith, in the tiny room on the left, slept deeply.

So Recklow went out into his garden, opened the wooden door in the wall, seated himself, lighted his pipe, and watched the Belfort road.

About ten o'clock two American electricians came buzzing up on motor-cycles. Recklow got up and went to the door in the wall as they dismounted. After a short, whispered consultation they guided their machines into the garden, through a paved alley to a tiled shed. Then they went on duty, one taking the telephone in Recklow's private office, the other busying himself with the clutter of maps and papers. And Recklow went back to the door in the wall. About eleven an American motor ambulance drove up. A nurse carrying her luggage got out, and Recklow met her.

After another whispered consultation he picked up the nurse's luggage, led her into the house, and showed her all over it.

"I don't know," he said, "whether they are too badly done in to travel as far as Belfort. There'll be a Yankee regimental doctor here to-day or to-morrow. He'll know. So let 'em sleep. And you can give them the once-over when they wake, and then get busy in the kitchen."

The girl laughed and nodded.

"Be good to them," added Recklow. "They'll get crosses and legions enough but they've got to be well to enjoy them. So keep them in bed until the doctor comes. There are bathrobes and things in my room."

"I understand, sir."

"Right," said Recklow briefly. Then he went to his room, changed his clothes to knickerbockers, his shoes for heavier ones, picked up a rifle, a pair of field-glasses and a gas-mask, slung a satchel contain-

ing three days' rations over his powerful shoulders, and went out into the street.

Six Alpinists awaited him. They were peculiarly accoutred, every soldier carrying, beside rifle, haversack and blanket, a flat tank strapped on his back like a knapsack.

Their sergeant saluted; he and Recklow exchanged a few words in whispers. Then Recklow strode away down the Belfort road. And the oddly accoutred Alpinists followed him, their steel-shod soles ringing on the pavement.

Where the Swiss wire bars the frontier no sentinels paced that noon. This was odd. Stranger still, a gap had been cut in the wire.

And into this gap strode Recklow, and behind him trotted the nimble blue-devils, single file; and they and their leader took the ascending path which leads to the Calvary on Mount Terrible.

Standing that same afternoon on the rocks of that grim Calvary, with the weatherbeaten figure of Christ towering on the black cross above them, Recklow and his men gazed out across the tumbled mountains to where the White Shoulder of Thusis gleamed in the sun.

Through their glasses they could sweep the glacier to its terminal moraine. That was not very far away, and the "dust" from the Staubbach could be distinguished drifting out of the green ravine like a windy cloud of steam.

"Allons," said Recklow briefly.

They slept that night in their blankets so close to the Staubbach that its wet, silvery dust powdered them, at times, like snow.

At dawn they were afield, running everywhere over the rocks, searching hollows, probing chasms, creeping into ravines, and always following the torrent which dashed whitely through its limestone cañon.

Perhaps the Alpine eagles saw them. But no Swiss patrol disturbed them. Perhaps there was fear somewhere in the Alpine Confederation—fear in high places.

Also it is possible that the bellowing bluster of the guns at Metz may have allayed that fear in high places; and that terror of the Hun was already becoming less deathly among the cantons of a race which had trembled under Boche blackmail for a hundred years. However, for whatever reason it might have been, no Swiss patrols bothered the blue devils and Mr. Recklow.

And they continued to swarm over the Alpine landscape at their own convenience; on the Calvary of Mount Terrible they erected a dwarf wireless station; a hundred men came from Delle with radio-impedimenta; six American airmen arrived; American planes circled over the northern border, driving off the squadrilla of Count von Dresslin.

And on the second night Recklow's men built fires and camped carelessly beside the brilliant warmth, while "mountain mutton" frizzled on pointed sticks and every blue-devil smacked his lips.

On the early morning of the third day Recklow discovered what he had been looking for. And an Alpinist signalled an airplane over Mount Terrible from the White Shoulder of Thusis. Two hours later a full battalion of Alpinists crossed Mount Terrible by the Neck of Woods and exchanged flag signals with Recklow's men. They had with them a great number of cylinders, coils of wire, and other curious-looking paraphernalia.

When they came up to the ravine where Recklow and his men were grouped they immediately became very busy with their cylinders, wires, hose-pipes, and other instruments.

It had been a beautiful ravine where Recklow now stood—was still as pretty and picturesque as a dry water-course can be with the bowlders bleaching in the sun and green things beginning to grow in what had been the bed of a rushing stream. For, just above this ravine, the water ended: the Staubbach poured its full, icy volume directly downward into the bowels of the earth with a hollow, thundering sound; the bed of the stream was bone-dry beyond. And now the blue-devils were unreeling wire and plumbing this chasm into which the Staubbach thundered. On the end of the wire was an electric bulb, lighted. Recklow watched the wire unreeling, foot after foot, rod after rod, plumbing the dark burrow of the Boche deep down under the earth.

And, when they were ready, guided by the wire, they lowered the curious hose-pipe, down, down, ever down, attaching reel after reel to the lengthening tube until Recklow checked them and turned to watch

the men who stood feeding the wire into the roaring chasm.

Suddenly, as he watched, the flowing wire stopped, swayed violently sideways, then was jerked out of the men's hands.

"The Boche bites!" they shouted. Their officer, reading the measured wire, turned to Recklow and gave him the depth; the hose-pipe ran out sixty yards; then Recklow checked it and put on his gas-mask as the whistle signal rang out along the mountain.

Now, everywhere, masked figures swarmed over the place; cylinders were laid, hose attached, other batteries of cylinders were ranged in line and connections laid ready for instant adjustment.

Recklow raised his right arm, then struck it downward violently. The gas from the first cylinder went whistling into the hose.

At the same time an unmasked figure on the cliff above began talking by American radiophone with three planes half a mile in the air above him. He spoke naturally, easily, into a transmitter to which no wires were attached.

He was still talking when Recklow arrived at his side from the ravine below, tore off his gas-mask, and put on a peculiar helmet. Then, taking the transmitter into his right hand: "Do you get them?" he demanded of his companion, an American lieutenant.

"No trouble, sir. No need to raise one's voice. They hear quite perfectly, and one hears them, sir."

Then Recklow spoke to the three airplanes circling

like hawks in the sky overhead; and one by one the observers in each machine replied in English, their voices easily audible.

"I want Zell watched from the air," said Recklow. "The Boche have an underground tunnel beginning near Zell, continuing under Mount Terrible to the French frontier.

"I want the Zell end of the tunnel kept under observation.

"Send our planes in from Belfort, Toul, Nancy, and Verdun.

"And keep me informed whether railroad trains, camions, or cavalry come out. And whether indeed any living thing emerges from the end of the tunnel near Zell.

"Because we are gassing the tunnel from this ravine. And I think we've got the dirty vermin wholesale!"

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At sundown a plane appeared overhead and talked to Recklow:

"One railroad train came out. But it was manned by dead men, I think, because it crashed into the rear masonry of the station and was smashed."

"Nothing else, living or dead, came out?"

"Nothing, sir. There is wild excitement at Zell. Troops at the tunnel's mouth wear gas-masks. We bombed them and raked them. The Boche planes took the air but two crashed and the rest turned east."

"You saw no living creature escape from the Zell end of the tunnel?"

"Not a soul, sir."

Recklow turned to the group of officers around him:

"I guess they're done for," he said. "That fumigation cleaned out the vermin. But keep the tunnel pumped full of gas. . . . Au revoir, messieurs!"

On his way back across Mount Terrible he encountered a relay of Alpinists bringing fresh gas-tanks; and he laughed and saluted their officers. "This poor old world needs a de-lousing," he said. "Foch will attend to it up here on top of the world. See that you gentlemen purge her interior!"

The nurse opened the door and looked into the garden. Then she closed the door, gently, and went back into the house.

For she had seen a slim girl with short yellow hair curling all over her head, and that head was resting on a young man's shoulder.

It seemed unnecessary, too, because there were two steamer chairs under the rose arbor, side by side, and pillows sufficient for each.

And why a slim young girl should prefer to pillow her curly, yellow head upon the shoulder of a rather gaunt young man—the shoulder, presumably, being bony and uncomfortable—she alone could explain perhaps.

The young man did not appear to be inconvenienced. He caressed her hair while he spoke:

"From here to Belfort," he was saying in his musing, agreeable voice, "and from Belfort to Paris;

and from Paris to London, and from London to Strathlone Head, and from Strathlone Head to Glenark Cliffs, and from Glenark Cliffs to Isla Water, and from Isla Water—to our home! Our home, Yellow-hair," he repeated. "What do you think of that?"

"I think you have forgotten the parson's house on the way. You are immoral, Kay."

"Can't a Yank sky-pilot in Paris——"

"Darling, I must have some clothing!"

"Can't you get things in Paris?"

"Yes, if you'll wait and not become impatient for Isla. And I warn you, Kay, I simply won't marry you until I have some decent gowns and underwear."

"You don't care for me as much as I do for you," he murmured in lazy happiness.

"I care for you more. I've cared for you longer, too."

"How long, Yellow-hair?"

"Ever—ever since your head lay on my knees in my car a year ago last winter! You know it, too," she added. "You are a spoiled young man. I shall not tell you again how much I care for you!"

"Say 'love,' Yellow-hair," he coaxed.

"No!"

"Don't you?"

"Don't I what?"

"Love me?"

"Yes."

"Then won't you say it?"

She laughed contentedly. Then her warm head

moved a little on his shoulder; he looked down; lightly their lips joined.

"Kay—my dear—dear Kay," she whispered.

"There's somebody opening the garden door," she said under her breath, and sat bolt upright.

McKay also sat up on his steamer chair.

"Oh!" he cried gaily, "hello, Recklow! Where on earth have you been for three days?"

Recklow came into the rose arbour. The blossoms were gone from the vines but it was a fragrant, golden place into which the September sun filtered. He lifted Miss Erith's hand and kissed it gravely. "How are you?" he inquired.

"Perfectly well, and ready for Paris!" she said smilingly.

Recklow shook hands with McKay.

"You'll want a furlough, too," he remarked. "I'll fix it. How do you feel, McKay?"

"All right. Has anything come out of our report on the Great Secret?"

Recklow seated himself and they listened in strained silence to his careful report. Once Evelyn caught her breath and Recklow paused and turned to look at her.

"There were thousands and thousands of insane down there under the earth," she said pitifully.

"Yes," he nodded.

"Did—did they all die?"

"Are the insane not better dead, Miss Erith?" he asked calmly. . . . And continued his recital.

That evening there was a full moon over the

garden. Recklow lingered with them after dinner for a while, discussing the beginning of the end of all things Hunnish. For Foch was striking at last; Pershing was moving; Haig, Gouraud, Petain, all were marching toward the field of Armageddon. They conversed for a while, the men smoking. Then Recklow went away across the dewy grass, followed by two frisky and factious cats.

But when McKay took Miss Erith's head into his arms the girl's eyes were wet.

"The way they died down there—I can't help it, Kay," she faltered. "Oh, Kay, Kay, you must love me enough to make me forget—forget——"

And she clasped his neck tightly in both her arms.

IN SECRET

by

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS